



by Mo Xiang

Advent of the Archmage



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Advent of the Archmage

– Descent of the God of Magic –

- Volume 3 -

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法神降临

游戏

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Chapter 145

Reaping All Kinds of Rewards!

Herrera went straight back to the academy after leaving the palace to report on the incident on Jade Street to the dean. Link was only a Magician with no rank or position at the moment, so there was no need for him to hurry anywhere. He took his time staying at an inn in the capital city, waiting for the title deed and declaration letter from the king.

Despite the terrible calamity caused by the Dark Elves recently, the Magician's Fair still went on as usual. Not only did the size of the crowd at the fair not decrease, there were, in fact, more people now who flocked to this part of the city to visit the site of the disaster.

Seeing that the fair was still going on, Herrera had placed Link's Matchstick wand and his other magic gear at a magical equipment shop in Jade Street. Link was sure that someone would buy them up soon enough.

Link stayed at the inn and didn't venture out anywhere at all. He spent all his time in his room working on the Flame Blast bracelet that was meant for the black-dressed lady.

He'd completed the rough sketches for the bracelet in the palace and had spent another day perfecting the details. By early morning of the second day, he was ready to roll up his sleeves start the real work.

He had all the best materials on hand – thorium, gold, and Fire Crystals. Furthermore, no one was there to interfere with his work. Thus, Link was able to devote all his energy to the intricate manipulation of the high-quality materials into complicated structure and patterns. As time went by, Link became more and more engrossed with his work that he began to take pleasure in it. There was nothing else in the world that he would rather be doing at that moment.

The whole process lasted for three whole days, after which Link successfully produced a beautiful Flame Blast bracelet with its main body made of gold and its Mana-conducting lines of thorium. The Fire Crystals were used as the nodes that made up

the magic seal on the bracelet.

The bracelet was shaped like a Phoenix that would wrap around the wearer's wrist with its head connected to its tail. The Phoenix was well known to die in a burst of flames and rise again from its ashes, so it was a becoming design to use in a Flame Blast bracelet. Each of its feathers was delicately rendered by Link's dexterous skills, and surrounding each feather were lines of thorium while beads of Fire Crystals were placed right in the middle of the feathers. They acted as magic seal nodes, with the biggest Fire Crystal bead making up the eye of the Phoenix. It was truly an immaculate magic gear both in its design and in its function.

The Fire Crystal that was the bird's eye was different from the rest on the feathers, though. The crystals on the feathers had sharp edges so they would sparkle as light danced on the bracelet's surface when it moved. The Fire Crystal that was the eye of the Phoenix, on the other hand, had been polished into a smooth teardrop shape that seemed to radiate with mysterious charm – in fact, it was the presence of this eye that had made the Phoenix bracelet look so uncannily life-like.

Viewed simply from the aspect of its appearance, this bracelet was impeccable.

As for the bracelet's functionality, Link had incorporated two very useful Supreme Magical Techniques modifications in the Flame Blast spell that was stored inside the Phoenix bracelet – resonance and accuracy. He'd also designed a robust pattern for the runic lines so that the spell wouldn't be misfired or destroyed unless if it was bent and distorted by an external force.

And finally, there was the signature Link had left on the bracelet. Although it was just a gift he still thought leaving his signature on his work was a must because each piece of work successfully produced was a source of pride for the enchantment Magician. And so Link left his signature on the inside of the bracelet where it would be hidden when worn.

Now the bracelet was complete. Link's heart was filled with pride as he inspected the finished product. He even felt slightly reluctant to give it away to someone else.

He then put away the bracelet and went back to his work table to check the materials that he had left. He discovered that he had an ounce of thorium, 3 ounces of gold and 15 pieces of cut Fire Crystal left.

Naturally, Link kept all these materials for his own use in the future.

This was the time he really understood how much money an enchantment Magician could make. He no longer wondered how Herrera could earn enough profits from her enchantment skills to buy a huge amount of magic materials. Even the leftover materials could be sold for an ample amount of gold coins.

As his work was now done, all that was left was to wait patiently. Link was confident that the black-dressed woman would soon come to meet him, so in the meantime, he stayed in the inn reading his magic books. When he had time to spare, he would take the wooden box given to him by the High Elf prince out and examine it.

The wooden box was lovely and very well-made with some masterful carving done on its surface. Imagine Link's confusion then, when he opened it and discovered that there was nothing but a thumb-sized white stone inside.

Yes, it really was just an ordinary-looking stone and nothing else. The stone's only unique feature was probably its somewhat smooth surface, but other than that, Link simply couldn't see what was special about this rock.

He couldn't detect a trace of Mana or spot any runic patterns on the stone and there were no jolts of energy fluctuations coming from it at all – to put it simply, the white stone was indistinguishable from any other old rock you could find by the riverbank.

The prince wouldn't play a joke on me, would he? Link wondered. What was he thinking giving me this white stone?

Link was confounded and couldn't think of any reason why the prince would bestow him such an odd gift. After scrutinizing it for a while, a notification suddenly appeared on the interface.

White Stone (Indestructible)

Quality: Unknown

Effects: Unknown

(Note: A gift from Prince Philip.)

Well, at least it was true that the stone was indestructible. Link had actually tried to

use enchantment techniques to change its properties and appearance, but none of his current tricks had had any effects on the stone. If it hadn't been for this strange property, Link would definitely have thrown the stone into some corner and leave it there a long time ago.

Could it be made of a material with too high a quality that it is beyond my capabilities to do anything to it? Link wondered. Could something like that exist, though?

After examining it for a while longer Link finally gave up with a long and deep sigh. He then closed the lid of the wooden box and put it back in its place. This was the first time he'd come across such a mystifying object ever since arriving in this world.

A day later, a messenger from the palace finally delivered the declaration letter and title deed from the king. Though these were only meant to be official documents, they were nevertheless of such a high quality that they seemed to be luxurious ornaments. The documents were stamped with the royal seal which had magic properties and were so intricate that they were extremely difficult to forge. Most importantly, these documents plainly stated the king's declaration that Link was now a Hereditary Baron of the Norton Kingdom whose seat of power was at the Ferde Wilderness.

The title deed had also clearly marked the boundaries at the south-eastern and north-western edge of the Ferde Wilderness, leaving no opportunities for disputes.

One thing worth mentioning was how King Leon seemed to be afraid that the new Baron would be too poor, so he put the coastal seas on the eastern side of the Ferde Wilderness under Link's ownership as well. Although the sea there was full of jagged reefs and unsuitable to be turned into ports, at least it was teeming with fish and other sea creatures that made some degree of fishing activities possible. Though it was impossible to get rich by relying on this alone, at the very least the new Baron wouldn't starve to death.

King Leon is indeed a considerate and generous man. Link then continued to examine the official documents with a contented heart when the idea of going back home suddenly popped up in his mind.

This body that his soul inhabited was a younger son of the Viscount Hamilton Morani. He'd left home for more than a year now and had successfully entered a prestigious magic academy and had even been awarded the title of a hereditary Baron. It was time for him to go home.

He wasn't going back to show off his glorious achievements, of course, but only because he realized that there was still a duty that he must fulfill back home.

There was no reason to worry about his father – he was a Viscount after all, who had children and grandchildren to look after him. The person Link was worried about was in fact his mother.

Link's mother wasn't the Viscount's first wife, who had died after bearing the Viscount two sons. He then felt lonely so he married Link's mother, who bore him a daughter and another son. This youngest son was Link, of course, while the daughter was Link's own elder sister who had now come of age but because the Viscount could only afford to give her a small dowry, no suitable man had asked for her hand yet.

The Viscount's first wife came from another powerful noble family. Her eldest son was the Viscount's heir apparent, so he would one day inherit all his land and title, while her second son was now a full-fledged knight with a bright future. Link's mother, on the other hand, had come from a minor clan with no name or fortune of her own. The Viscount's two older sons had no respect for her at all and had always tried to force her out of the Viscount's castle since the first day she married into this family.

Link remembered how they finally succeeded in driving his mother out five years ago. She was ousted from the castle by his eldest brother and was now living in a small cottage in the countryside. His sister was allowed to remain in the castle as she could be used as a tool to solidify a political alliance by marrying her off to a suitable family.

These were some of the rotten affairs going on within the Morani family. Link had no intention of interfering in it. He couldn't change the past, but he still had the ability to improve the present. He had the ability to support his mother now, so he planned to make the appropriate arrangements to enable her to come and live with him. Link just couldn't bear to let her live out the rest of her poor life alone and uncared for.

It wasn't that Link was determined to help her out of any emotional attachment since he'd never actually met her, but only because it was the most righteous thing to do.

The Hamilton estate was in the Pufferfish County about a hundred miles north of the Girvent Forest. It shouldn't take too much time to go there, thought Link.

He then started to write a letter home, briefly summarizing his current situation and mentioning the date that they could expect him to be home. Once he was done he

dropped it into the mailbox at the entrance of the inn.

When he returned to his room, he could sense something different in the room, as if there was a foreign presence there.

He scanned the room but didn't see anyone there. Then suddenly, he noticed something from the corner of his eyes – a black raven perched proudly on his reading table with its beady eyes staring intently at Link.

"I knew you'd come," said Link as he closed the door. When he turned back around, Eleanor had already transformed back into her human form.

"Is my gear ready?" she asked as she picked up a tool of enchantment on the table. She noticed the debris left on the tool and could guess the answer to her question herself. "I'm guessing it is, huh?"

Link nodded then handed over the Flame Blast bracelet to her.

Eleanor's eyes widened the moment she had her eyes on the bracelet. She turned it over back and forth gently in her hands, visibly getting more and more impressed by Link's creation. She handled the bracelet very carefully as if afraid that she might break it.

"Don't worry," said Link with a laugh. "I've made it to be sturdy enough. It won't break as long as you don't hit it with a hammer."

Link's remarks went unnoticed as Eleanor continued to be deeply enchanted by the Phoenix bracelet. She tried wearing it on her wrist and found that it felt just right – it was neither too tight nor too loose, and it even felt smooth and luxurious as it brushed against her skin.

"It's marvelous!" exclaimed Eleanor. She loved it the moment she set her eyes on it. She'd be more than willing to wear the bracelet all the time even if it didn't contain any magical power.

Oh, that's right. I should check the spell in this bracelet too. Then, the more she examined the bracelet the more astonished she was at its superior quality.

"There's something different about this Flame Blast," remarked Eleanor. "Is it the same kind that you used in that battle? Oooh, but you didn't just improve its accuracy, you've

incorporated such...such a sublime structure for this spell!"

She then turned her gaze away from the bracelet and stared at Link with wonder.

"Aren't you worried that I might learn your secret skills from this bracelet?" she asked.

This single bracelet would compensate her lack of direct combat skills. With it she would be able to cast Flame Blast in no time at all – she shuddered just from thinking about possessing such terrifying power.

"You can do whatever you want," replied Link with a shrug. "I just have to do my best once I've set my mind to do something, otherwise I won't be able to go to sleep at night."

He'd only incorporated two Supreme Magical Skills in the bracelet, after all, of which the combined value was minuscule compared to that of the Scroll of Enlightenment. Besides, he wasn't planning on stopping his progress anytime soon. He would surely be learning countless more powerful spells than Flame Blast in the future. Flame Blast wasn't even the best weapon he had in his arsenal anyway, what had given him the crucial edge in battles were in fact his lightning-fast spellcasting and the aid from the gaming system.

Eleanor thought differently, though. She kept admiring the exquisite bracelet and sighed. This quality far exceeds my expectations, she thought. It seems I've struck gold in this deal.

She then handed the Scroll of Enlightenment over to Link.

"I've studied this scroll thoroughly," she said. "I don't think I could glean any more knowledge from it than what I've already learned. I'm giving it to you in return for saving my life."

Even without the exquisite bracelet, the debt of gratitude Eleanor owed Link for saving her the other day in Jade Street alone was great enough that she was willing to give up the scroll for him.

"But isn't this...?" Link was momentarily stupefied. Even though he had memorized every detail of the scroll before, so he possibly had no need for it but... The scroll was nevertheless invaluable because he could use it to look for the five remaining Scrolls of Enlightenment. When he thought of this point, Link immediately decided to accept

Eleanor's gift.

"Alright," said Link, "I'll accept it. Thank you."

Eleanor nodded her head, albeit not without a heavy heart. This scroll was her most treasured possession that had been with her for the last thirty years. She was slightly upset that she had to part with it after all these years. Still, it was too late to change her mind now, so she took a deep breath and held back her emotions.

"I've got something else to tell you," she then said. "Do you remember the Dark Elf swordswoman who managed to escape?"

"Of course I do," replied Link, stunned by Eleanor's sudden question.

"Well, I've caught her," she said.

"Where is she?" asked Link enthusiastically.

"Leave Springs City and head back to the East Cove Magic Academy," she said. "I will meet you on the way. Be careful not to let anyone follow you, the MI3 people are hot on her trail right now."

"Understood."

Chapter 146

Glyph of Soul (2)

Link took a carriage out of Hot Springs City to the outskirts. After paying the fare, he traveled on foot for a few miles before a black raven perched itself on his shoulders—it was Eleanor.

"Turn left at the next corner," the raven whispered.

The path in front was a narrow, winding and dark road into the forest. Link was slightly hesitant. After all, he was not very familiar with this woman. If he were to go into such a remote place with her, he risked walking right into a trap.

However, he quickly dismissed this thought as preposterous. He rationalized that there was no need to go to such lengths if she truly wanted to kill him. She could have easily done so on Jade Street when he was preoccupied with the three Dark Elves. Furthermore, she wouldn't have given him access to the Scroll of Enlightenment.

Link then walked towards the alley in confident strides.

Eleanor was slightly puzzled. "Aren't you afraid that I will harm you?"

Link smiled and said, "You specialize in secret magic. If you had wanted to harm me, I would probably already be dead." Secret spells were not built for direct combat. However, they were extremely lethal when used in sneak attacks. Many times, the victim would not even realize how they died. This was true even for Magicians. Eleanor simply laughed.

After round 600 feet, they entered the deepest part of the forest. The overgrowth was getting thicker by the moment, devouring the path they were on.

"Are we there yet?" Link asked.

"We are still five miles away. I presume you would have learned some traveling spells by now?" Eleanor spoke with a hint of disapproval in her voice. How could a Magician like Link travel simply by walking?

Link only knew one such spell. He began to summon his Wind Fenrir. His speed increased exponentially after riding his summon. In two minutes, they reached a stream in the middle of the forest.

"There is a hunter's hut straight ahead. It's right there, do you see it?" Eleanor asked.

It was a small, wooden hut that was built to offer passing hunters refuge for the night. The roof was full of algae and the wooden doors were filled with decaying holes.

When they reached the front of the wooden hut, Eleanor jumped down from Link's shoulders and turned into her human form. As Link entered the room behind Eleanor, he saw a huge bed in the room. A female Dark Elf could be seen restrained on pieces of rotten beast hide infested with worms. The rope used to restrain her seemed to be glowing slightly, probably enchanted with some sort of sealing spell. Under the effect of this magical rope, the Dark Elf was unable to move.

When she heard movements coming from the door, she immediately turned and threw a deathly stare in that direction with her pair of crimson eyes.

However, this was only directed at Eleanor. When she saw Link, her expression changed to one that was shocked and dumbfounded, her eyes involuntarily showing signs of retreat. The battle at Jade Street against Link had completely destroyed her pride.

Eleanor sat down on a broken stool and stared pitifully at the Dark Elf on the bed. She then began her introduction, "I have already done my research. The three Dark Elves that day were Felidia, a Magician, Ainos, an Assassin, and lastly, this woman. She is Alina, a Level-5 Assassin and apparently a famous figure in the Pralync Kingdom. She also has a prominent background, being the daughter of King Norigan. Many people call her the Constellation Assassin."

Link was appalled. He thought, it's no wonder that they were strong. They were the Three Musketeers!

In the first two versions of the game, the three of them wreaked great havoc on the human race. The eventual collapse of the Norton Kingdom could definitely be traced back to their actions. To think that the Three Musketeers would suffer such a fate in this timeline. Two of them were already dead while the other was now a captive under his hands.

He then saw a sword lying on top of a small table. If this person was indeed Alina, this sword would be the infamous weapon, the Sword of Shattered Stars.

He unsheathed the sword and a blast of cold air immediately engulfed the atmosphere. The sword shone brightly even under the dim sunlight as the entire sword body was made of thorium. Link carefully studied the sword and gasped. How extravagant, this is a fine piece of work.

"Don't touch it with your dirty human hands!" Alina shouted in rage. She said this sentence in human language.

Link pretended not to hear her and brandished the sword right in front of her. He then spun around and asked Eleanor, "I can probably guess the motive of their mission. It was to assassinate Prince Phillip and sow discord between the human race and the High Elves. Am I right?"

Eleanor nodded. "Of course. Their plan was almost flawless. It is a shame that they met a monster like you."

"Did you manage to get any other information?" Link asked.

Eleanor simply smiled and said, "I did, but you might not like the method I used to get this information."

"You are referring to the Soul Search spell I suppose. I don't really dislike it as long as it is useful," Link laughed. While the Soul Search spell indeed belonged to the realm of dark magic, it was still a useful spell. In fact, he even learned it while he was playing the game. Although he would not voluntarily learn the spell in this timeline, he definitely would not dismiss its effectiveness either.

Eleanor looked at Link carefully and found no trace of disgust or disapproval on his face. She was puzzled. "This is a forbidden spell. Shouldn't you be horrified and accuse me of being a dark witch?"

The Sacred Land of Light had an irrational fear of dark magic and that was exactly the reason Eleanor was alone all these years. Her life was basically a game of hide-and-seek with ordinary humans. Whenever she felt exposed after staying in a location for too long, she would immediately relocate to ensure her safety. Even her Mage Tower was instantly mobile.

"Stop testing the waters. Truthfully, I am not a fan of such spells and thus would not attempt to learn them. However, I have no right to ask others to do the same. I am sure the vengeful souls on Jade Street would have no qualms about you using such spells on the Dark Elves. There is then no reason for me to oppose the use of such spells."

Link was open to the discussion of dark magic. After all, every successful person in the world would have some dirt under their nails. If Link were to follow the rules strictly, he would never have been able to defeat the dark forces.

He then continued, "What did you find?"

"Alright then. You are the weirdest person I've ever met. But I guess it is for the best. If you don't mind, take a look at this." Eleanor passed him a scroll.

The scroll looked extremely ordinary. After opening it, Link realized that the scroll was filled with characters from the Dark Elf language. The arrangement of the characters was interesting as well, lining up in a specific formation that seemed to dictate their relationship with one another. Link came to an understanding after a few looks.

"The original copy of the Dark Elf's secret code?"

"That is what I think." Eleanor shrugged her shoulders, before speaking in a regretful tone, "It is unfortunate that we did not come across any secret messages. This thing is too valuable."

Alina was completely startled. She was clear of the consequences if the secret code fell into the hands of the human race. Careful and intelligent use of the secret code would be a devastating blow to the Death Hand and even might even destroy the entire Pralync Kingdom.

Her instinct was to immediately destroy the scroll. However, her strength was completely restrained and all she could do was cast worried glances in Link's direction.

Link smiled and said, "We don't have any secret messages. However, MI3 would have a lot of them. We can just pass this to them." He carefully studied the secret code and memorized the all the contents of the scroll. He did actually have a secret message scroll with him and could decipher it with the help of this treasure. However, there was no need for Eleanor to know about this.

The secret code was the most valuable loot in this mission. Link then turned his attention towards the Constellations Assassin, thinking of how to dispose of the Dark Elf.

Eleanor chuckled, "Are you hesitant to kill such a beautiful young girl?"

Alina indeed had an exquisite face and a voluptuous body. She would be considered a rare beauty even by human standards. However, that was all a facade. Her true form was a ruthless and crazy Assassin, as evidenced by the destructive ambush in Jade Street.

At the same time, she was an extremely talented Dark Elf Assassin. He could not let such a strong opponent live.

Should I kill her directly? Or should I remove her combat powers instead and turn her into a disgrace of the Dark Elves? After some thought, Link raised the Sword of Shattered Stars and placed it over Alina's chest.

He would end it once and for all!

Alina could see the shadows of death looming precariously over her. She stared at Link furiously and said, "Link, you will suffer the endless pursuit of the Death Hand the moment I die. I will be waiting for your soul in hell!"

Link simply laughed, "I guess you will have to be very patient." He gently pushed the sword down and the sharp blade effortlessly pierced through Alina's heart, ending her life.

Eleanor then spoke in a regretful tone, "To think that a princess would die in such a rundown place. If we had given her to MI3, she would have fetched a huge price."

"She has seen too much. If she was handed over to MI3, you would also be in danger."

Link had considered that option before killing Alina. However, this would not only reveal Eleanor's connection with dark magic, he would also be embroiled in the dark magic mess. The risks definitely outweighed the benefits.

Of course, Link was not about to leave without getting any rewards. The moment Alina breathed her last, a message appeared in his vision.

Mission: Rescue Second Step (Completed)

Player receives one Glyph of Soul.

Glyph of Soul

Level: 5

Effect: Player can choose to store a spell Level-5 and below in the Glyph of Soul. This will greatly reduce the time needed to construct the magic structure. This will not reduce the strength of the spell.

(Note: This is perfect for Magicians who want a fast spellcasting speed.)

Link was elated, this is too good to be true!

Chapter 147

The Flaming Hand (1)

Alina's lifeless body was set on fire and burned to ashes. Link then spread the ashes across the surface of the stream in the middle of the forest and let her remains flow away with the course of the water.

And that was the end of the Three Musketeers of the Silver Moon.

Her sword was made of solid gold and the magic seal on it contained a lot of thorium, so Link used his enchantment skill to isolate these elements and divide them equally between Eleanor and himself.

From there, Link now had ten pounds of gold and another ounce of thorium, which in total was worth the eye-watering amount of 20,000 gold coins.

Once everything was settled, Link and Eleanor then parted ways at King's Lane near the Girvent Forest.

"I've repaid my debt to you for saving my life with the Scroll of Enlightenment. I've even helped you in deciphering the code in the original scroll and found Alina – don't you think you should show me a bit more gratitude?"

Link thought she had a point there, he never expected to have gained so much by acquainting himself with a person he had assumed to be evil. The Scroll of Enlightenment, the Glyph of Soul, the secret code document—Link had acquired all this with Eleanor's help and they were all extremely useful items!

His skills in enchantment were something he was proud of the most right now, so he made Eleanor an offer.

"I'll make you another magic gear then," he said.

"Good!" replied Eleanor. "My left arm feels a bit empty at the moment, I think another bracelet there would be nice, but I don't feel like forking out the gold coins for the price of the materials."

"Alright, I got it," said Link. "I'll start working on it the moment I get back to the academy. Write to me when you want to get it and I'll send it to you."

"It's a deal," said Eleanor. "Make sure this new bracelet of mine is as exquisite as my Phoenix bracelet, or I won't forgive you for it!" She caressed the beloved Flame Blast bracelet on her wrist lovingly as she spoke, although she had now renamed it as her Phoenix bracelet.

"I will try my best," said Link with a pursed smile.

They then waved goodbye to each other and Link turned down King's Lane. Eleanor stood in the forest watching Link's figure disappear gradually.

"Link, my name is Eleanor!" she shouted when Link was almost out of sight.

Link didn't turn back around but waved his hand to indicate that he'd heard her. He walked on until finally his figure was blocked behind a tree and disappeared completely.

Eleanor sighed softly as she turned around and headed into the depths of the Girvent Forest.

Now I'm alone again, she thought.

Meanwhile, Link walked along King's Lane alone. He could encounter someone anytime on the road so he didn't summon the Wind Fenrir to avoid alarming a passerby, so he continued to walk all the way back.

After about ten minutes of walking, an oxcart came up behind him. He gave the peasant driving the oxcart a silver coin and hopped on it. The oxcart moved sluggishly, so he only reached the academy late in the afternoon.

It was winter at the time and the weather hadn't been so good on that day as well. There were even some snowflakes drifting in the wind. Once he stepped down from the oxcart, Link gathered his sleeves and pulled up the hood of his robe and entered the academy.

It had been such a cold day, in fact, even Vincent was absent from his usual spot in the garden. He had kept himself warm inside the cottage instead. When he heard someone's footsteps at the gates, he opened the window to take a look outside. Once

he discovered it was someone wearing the Magician's robe of the East Cove Magic Academy he decided there was no threat to be found and closed the window.

As he treaded the snow-covered path in the chilly wind on his way back to his Mage Tower, Link suddenly thought of his mother again.

Her name was Lilith. She was 40 years old this year and she was a woman so kind and gentle that one might think she was weak. Link wondered how she was getting along now in that small cottage in the countryside.

There were always shortages of all kinds in that cottage, thought Link. I wonder if she had enough coal and firewood to protect her from this cold. How are the servants treating her? Does she even have enough clothes or food to survive this season?

Although she was just the mother of this body that his soul inhabited and was not his actual blood relation at all, the memories of her still remained in his mind, making it hard for him to bear the thoughts that she might be suffering a hard life right now.

I've refused the offers from the dean and the king to join the army, so there shouldn't be any reason blocking me from visiting her. Pufferfish County isn't so far away from here, anyway. I'd better pay her a visit.

As he came to a decision Link's footsteps began to quicken. He reached the Mage Tower right when Herrera was giving a lecture to the apprentices in the hall on the first floor. When she saw Link, she nodded at him and continued her lecture. Link took a seat in the hall and went on to study a magic textbook there.

Half an hour later, Herrera's lecture was over. She then walked over to Link.

"Is everything in the capital city settled?" she asked.

"Yes," answered Link. "I've gotten hold of some things that I must inform you of, but I can't do it here." Link was using the softest voice possible to prevent anyone from overhearing him. He was talking about the secret code document that Eleanor had given him. He knew that the authorities would find it very useful.

"Let's go to the top floor," Herrera said.

Once they reached the top floor, Link took out the cypher scroll and the secret code document, although the secret code document wasn't the one Eleanor gave him but

was a copy that he made on the oxcart. He did this to protect Eleanor's existence from the authorities.

Herrera was oblivious to this small detail. She examined the scrolls for a while and discovered that they were indeed very important documents.

"Where did you get these?" she asked full of shock.

"One of my followers accidentally discovered this cypher scroll at the Cliff of Howling Winds," explained Link. "While the secret code document was given to me by the black dressed woman." It was too late to conceal Eleanor's existence, but he decided that he wouldn't reveal the friendship between them just yet.

"Black-dressed woman?" asked Herrera, more and more confused now. "Do you mean that mysterious Magician?"

"Yes," answered Link. "She was at Jade Street when the Flame Blast explosion happened and barely managed to escape death because of it. I guess she gave this to me because she believed that I could somehow defeat the Dark Elves who had almost killed her." It wasn't the whole truth, but Link sounded convincing when he uttered it because he believed it was a necessary lie and his conscience was clear.

As expected, Herrera believed him. She put the cypher scroll and the secret code document side by side and began to compare them. She did this for a few minutes before her eyebrows furrowed and she turned her gaze up to Link.

"It says here," she began with a grave tone, "that the Dark Elves are planning something called the Black Moon Conspiracy... and they mentioned a Dark Elf called Felidia... But there was no mention of what the plan was about and who was going to be involved..."

Link hadn't found the right time and place to translate the codes himself, so he started doing so now. He discovered that the information on the cypher scroll was short and simple. Apart from the words Black Moon Conspiracy and the name of the now dead Felidia, the only other key information on the scroll was a date – April 4.

It was now January 3, about three and a half months away from the date mentioned. Although it wasn't stated explicitly on the scroll it was very likely that the date was to be the operation date for the Black Moon Conspiracy.

Nevertheless, a date was far from enough information. They still had no idea what the Black Moon Conspiracy was or which part of the Norton Kingdom would be targeted.

"We need more information," said Herrera. She suspected that something terrible was going to happen, something that would eclipse the tragedy that happened on Jade Street recently.

"Tutor, don't you think we should hand these documents over to the MI3?" suggested Link. "They've always dealt with the Dark Elves in the Death Hand, perhaps this would provide them with vital information."

Link realized that the course of history had deviated from the original version in the game more and more now that he could no longer predict the future. There had never been such a thing as the Black Moon Conspiracy in the game so Link guessed that it might concern the East Cove Magic Academy, although he decided to keep quiet about it for now as it was only a speculation.

"You're right," agreed Herrera after thinking it over for a few moments, "we should hand it over to MI3." Herrera then gathered the scrolls in her hands and was ready to leave. "We are in a dire situation. I must report this to the dean right away. Only he has enough power and authority to take the right steps quickly."

Link nodded in agreement. The dean's help would be crucial right now.

"Tutor," said Link before Herrera left, "in five days, it'll be the Winter Veil Festival. I'd like to visit my family and spend half a month with them. I'll be on my way soon."

The Winter Veil Festival was the most important festival in the Firuman calendar. It was the occasion when everyone who had ventured out of their hometown would journey back for a reunion with their families.

Herrera was slightly taken aback by the sudden change of topic, but eventually she nodded.

"Be careful on the road," she said. "And don't forget to study and practice!"

"Yes, tutor," answered Link.

Link then went back to his room and packed his luggage. There wasn't much packing to do as he didn't have much to bring, plus he could just put everything inside his

storage pendant. A few minutes later, he was done and ready to go, so he bid farewell to Eliard and arranged some studying plans for his disciple Rylai. He left the academy early morning the next day, heading north to the Pufferfish County.

It was still peaceful and quiet in the Girvent Forest when he was traveling through it along the King's Lane. But unbeknownst to Link, ten miles away three Dark Elves in disguise were entering Springs City.

Of the three, one was a Magician, one was an Assassin and the other was a Warrior. All of them were Level-5. They were the retainers of the Norigan Familia who had come down south in the Norton Kingdom to rescue the clan leader's beloved daughter – the swordswoman Alina.

Link was oblivious to all this as he was engrossed in an advanced magic textbook in the carriage. It was titled The Flaming Hand and its content was devoted to the eponymous spell.

The spell caught his attention because even though the Level-5 Glyph of the Soul would allow him to engrave any spell that was lower than Level-5, it would be a big waste to do so. The only way to make use of such a priceless reward from the gaming system was to engrave a powerful Level-5 spell on his soul with it.

The Flaming Hand was a Level-5 spell with a frightening power. Apart from that, when mastered the spellcaster would be able to accurately control this spell to cause devastating effects. It was indeed a terrifying weapon when used in a battle.

Naturally though, because of its powerful affects, the rate of Mana consumption was abnormally high as well.

It was unlike any other spell Link had mastered so far in the sense that it consumed Mana continuously, not just at the moment of casting like the rest. When there was no opponent present, the spell would consume 10 Mana Points per second to sustain it. When facing an opponent, the rate of Mana consumption would increase the higher the opponent's level was. For example, when fighting against a Level-5 opponent, the spell could consume as high as 100 Mana Points per second. If the opponent was a Level-6 Magician though, then the spell would be virtually useless since the Mana consumption rate would be so high that the opponent would be able to defeat you in one move.

Link couldn't afford this rate of Mana consumption in the past, but he now had 200 Omni Points and a 1900 maximum Mana limit.

It was a mystery to Link, but ever since receiving Herrera's angelic blessings, his Mana had recovered rapidly, especially when he basked in the sunlight. In slightly more than a month, his maximum Mana limit had increased from 1800 to 1900 points.

Link thought this must be the side effects of receiving the blessings from an Angel of Light.

Since his Mana wouldn't be a limitation now, he naturally wanted to begin mastering the extraordinary spell immediately.

Chapter 148

The Flaming Hand (2)

In the middle of the night. Hot Springs City, the Magician's District, Central Plaza ruins

It had been a week since the day of the tragedy. The dead bodies and rubble had already been properly disposed of. A variety of tools and materials could be seen laying on the ground around the destroyed architectures. The city had begun recovering from the incident and was in the midst of reconstruction.

However, the huge crater near the fountain at the center of the plaza was still present. The fragments of charred flesh stuck in between the cracks on the ground and the two visible trails of Link's Flame Blast spell served as a stark reminder of the cruelty of the attack.

A shadow draped in a large cloak emerged from a broken hut. He then crouched down and carefully observed the rubble and trails on the ground.

After a moment, the shadow spoke, "These stones have a blackened surface and show signs of melting. They seem to spread out in a conical formation. This person had cast a single directional fire elemental spell, at least Level-4 in strength."

Another figure behind him replied, "It does not matter what method he used. He will definitely be dead. Did you find any traces of the princess?"

"No need to rush." The shadow said before materializing a wand in his hands. A moment after he raised his wand, the tip of the wand was enveloped in a light purple glimmer which was almost invisible to the naked eye. The light then diffused over the plaza ruins.

After 20 seconds, a silver glow appeared on top of a hut at the corner of the plaza

"It's the Silver Moon blood! It's from the princess!" The shadow quickly said.

The Silver Moon blood was commonly known as the Holy Demon blood. It was a unique trait of the three largest families in the Pralync Kingdom. The blood contained

certain special magic properties that made it detectable by a specific spell.

The moment he spoke, two figures rushed out from behind and traveled hastily towards the hut.

These three people were the masters of the Norigan Familia. Their mission was to rescue Princess Alina from the clutches of the human race.

Of the two figures who rushed out, one of them was equipped with two long swords. He was a Warrior and was traveling at a slow pace. On the other hand, his comrade was outrageously fast and stealthy, much like a cloud of smoke. The moment the Magician finished his speech, he was already at the hut marked by the Silver Moon blood.

He was an Assassin that specialized in tracking. He was revered as a battle hound.

He squatted down and observed the blood carefully.

"Parson, Norisa, this is the princess' blood. The blood stain was oval in shape and unevenly dispersed. This meant that the princess was traveling at a fast speed at that moment. It seemed like she headed west."

He spoke while following the trail of blood, soon arriving at the alley Alina was in the previous day. The Magician and Warrior followed closely behind him.

Traces of Alina became more obvious and voluminous as they entered the alley. Blood stains, slightly sunken footprints and the dent in the walls caused by a heavy landing. Although a week had passed and such traces were almost undetectable to ordinary humans, it was easily captured by the Assassin.

The trio traced these trails through half the city until they reached the most western Prince Bill Area.

Prince Bill Area was the affluent district of Hot Springs City. It housed many beautiful parks decorated with towering trees and small round shrubs regularly trimmed. The trio lost all clues in one of these parks.

"All of the traces are gone. This is strange, the princess seems to have disappeared into thin air." The Assassin was perplexed.

The Magician who had kept silent all these while spoke, "No, the situation is weird. I feel the remnant magic fluctuations of a powerful Magician."

Dark Elves had a natural talent for night vision. The blanket of darkness and silence over the park had in fact heightened Magician Parson's senses, allowing him to detect even the faintest of magic fluctuations. He walked around the park in a circle before stopping behind a piece of wood.

He had actually already felt this mysterious aura at the plaza ruins. However, due to the explosions of several Flame Blast spells and the bustle of the city in the morning, the aura was extremely disorienting. On the other hand, the situation in the park was different. There was only one clear magic aura around the area, much like a flaming torch in the darkness.

"The magic aura here is the most intense! Hedel, come and take a look."

Hedel was the name of the Assassin. He walked towards the wood and circled around it before suddenly reaching out his hand, making a grabbing action. When he retracted his hand, he was holding a strand of black hair.

"It's a woman's hair. From the glow and texture, it feels like a 20-year-old girl," Hedel spoke.

Magician Parsons, on the other hand, felt something was amiss. He took another glance before raising his staff to cast a detection spell on the hair.

Under the effect of the spell, the hair immediately exuded a faint white glow. This glow was similar to a mist slowly being released from the strand of hair. As the mist dissipated into the hair, the strand of hair seemed to lose its luster.

"This is not a normal human girl. She is a secret magic Magician that is way older than 20 years old. If I am not wrong, her target is the princess."

He then looked around before pointing at the ground 15 feet away from the wood, "These should be her footprints. Try to see if you can locate her."

"Alright." Hedel began to wander around the area, sometimes even laying on the ground for closer observation. After around five minutes, he spoke, "I have found it. This way."

The two of them once again followed behind.

The trio went all the way out of Hot Springs City. Several times, Hedel lost all clues of the princess, but with the help of Magician Parsons' keen senses, they would quickly get back on track.

After a moment, they stared at each other.

"The princess had been held captive by a secret Magician and was brought out of the capital. The situation is grave." Magician Parsons frowned. He knew that secret Magicians were also usually known as dark Magicians.

Although the Dark Elves had a higher tolerance for black magic than the human race, they also had a deeper understanding about the cruelty and unpredictability of such magic. If the princess was subjected to torture under such magic, she would likely lose all rationality even if she was not dead.

"Don't think too much. Our mission is simply to save the princess! There are still clues!" the Warrior Norisa spoke.

"That's right." Hedel nodded and rushed forward.

It could be inferred from the traces that the secret Magician stuffed the princess onto a carriage before bringing her out of the city, heading west along King's Lane.

After an hour of tracking the clear trails of the carriage, Hedel spoke, "They alighted from the carriage. The princess' footprints can be seen for a while before disappearing."

Parsons then spoke, "That is normal. The secret Magician is a female and probably does not have much physical strength. She should have cast a levitation spell. Her footprints alone will suffice."

Hedel squinted his eyes and traveled along the forest alleyway. After a while, he gasped. "Parsons, what kind of beast is this? It is humongous!"

The forest pathways were getting more uneven and difficult to maneuver around. The appearance of a giant beast's footprint was thus a shock to Hedel. The situation seemed to be more complex than he imagined.

Parsons crouched down and carefully observed the footprints. After a few minutes, he spoke, "These are the footprints of a summon called Wind Fenrir. There is a new source of magic aura here...in fact, this is the second time this aura appeared. The first time was in Hot Springs City when we were investigating the plaza ruins. He should be the person who released the single directional Level-4 fire elemental spell."

"Could it be that he is an ally of the secret Magician?" Warrior Norisa immediately made the connection.

"Very likely." Parsons had a serious expression on his face. When they were collecting information in Hot Springs City, they had a quick overview of the events that unfolded on Jade Street. A human Magician seemed to have defeated the princess.

To think that the Magician would once again appear on the princess' trails outside of Hot Springs City together with the secret Magician. This would only mean that the princess managed to make her escape but eventually became his captive. The princess was probably...Parsons did not want to continue down this train of thought.

His two other comrades also had a sunken expression on their faces.

The clear footprints from the Wind Fenrir made the tracking process a lot easier. The trio reached a small hut beside a stream after half an hour. The moment they stepped in front of the hut, Magician Parsons' had a livid expression.

He felt the aura of death.

He kept silent and entered the hut. The first thing that caught his attention the moment he entered was the huge blood stain on the bed. He cast a detection spell and the blood stain immediately emitted a silver hue. It was the princess' blood.

Assassin Hedel similarly found many clues. He exited the hut and traced the trails all the way to the stream, where he came to a conclusion on Alina's outcome

"She was killed. Her body was burned to ashes and then scattered into the running stream." Hedel spoke calmly, though his pair of dark red eyes was already burning with a faint glimmer of Battle Aura.

"Is it possible to track the whereabouts of both the Magicians?" Norisa held his sword tightly. Since the princess was already killed, they would have to avenge her in some way.

Parsons did not reply immediately. Instead, he circled the hut three times before concluding, "The secret Magician was extremely careful. She erased all clues that could allow us to trace her whereabouts. However, the young Magician will not be able to escape! He is a Magician from the East Cove Higher Magic Academy called Link. He is quite a famous person in this area. Let's go pay him a visit!"

"I will gouge his heart out right there!" Hedel smiled cruelly.

Parsons shook his head, "No, we should bring him back to the North and present him to the King. The King will show him what exactly is cruelty!"

"Yes, Parsons is right. We cannot let this Magician die so easily." Norisa gritted his teeth.

Chapter 149

The Flaming Hand (3)

On King's Lane.

Link was completely unaware that he was being watched. He had now reached the outskirts of the Pufferfish County – the estate of his father, the Viscount Hamilton Morani.

In front of him was the Clearwater River, which was a river of about 300 feet wide where various types of ships frequently sailed. After traveling along the King's Lane for a few hours, Link was now approaching a great bridge.

The bridge was called the Great Hamilton Bridge. It was built by the Viscount and had always been a source of pride for him. The toll tax collected from the ships that sailed pass this bridge on Clearwater River was about 500 gold coins per year, and it was the main source of income for the Morani family.

It could be said that this bridge had provided the whole of the Morani family with all their necessities and luxuries.

Link's carriage was now on the Great Hamilton Bridge. He looked out into the distance and saw a castle on the hillside. This was the Morani Castle where Link's physical body had spent his first fifteen years.

It's been two years now, thought Link. I wonder if my eldest brother is still as bossy as before. Is my second brother's lust for women constrained now by any measure? I hope my sister didn't get bullied much.

Link's elder sister was his only full sibling, so they were very close with each other when he was still living in the castle. When he was little, his sister was always there to protect him and take care of him, but as he got older Link turned into a quiet and reserved young man while his sister became more and more worried about her own future, so they weren't as close as they used to be now.

Link didn't dwell on these thoughts about his family for long, though. Soon enough his

attention was focused back on the magic textbook in his hands.

The Pufferfish County was about a hundred miles away from the East Cove Magic Academy. He started the journey yesterday morning and stayed at an inn by the road for a night. It was now the evening of the second day; Link had been continuously studying the Level-5 spell, the Flaming Hand. By now, every minute detail of the spell's structure had been firmly planted in his memory.

He'd never practiced it in the Elemental Pool though, so Link didn't dare to use it indiscriminately yet. This was a Level-5 fire element spell, not only did it contain a frightening amount of power, the fire elements that made up the spell were also notoriously difficult to control. This meant that the slightest mistakes he made might result in a cataclysmic explosion!

This is a powerful spell that needs to be controlled very precisely, Link pondered. It would make a good weapon to attack opponents with and an excellent defensive spell. Maybe I should engrave this spell on my soul with the Glyph of Soul.

Once the spell was engraved on his soul with the Glyph of Soul, he could then cast the spell without constructing the spell structure in his mind. All he had to do was trigger his Mana and wait for the elements to converge and condense and the spell would take form perfectly every time – how simple would that be?

But this is just the regular version of the spell, thought Link. If I'm going to engrave a spell with the Glyph of Soul, I'd better modify it with some Supreme Magical Skills first to make the best of it.

With his fast thinking speed, Link managed to study The Flaming Hand from cover to cover in a single day. This meant that he had a whole day left to ponder on how to improve the spell with Supreme Magical Skills, of which he now had some rough ideas.

The inspiration for these ideas came once again from the space-time thesis that he had been working on. At present, Link had developed his thesis to a point where he had hit upon the profound layer of the truth fabric. It had yielded him with unexpected insights that led to his extraordinary innovations which had helped in gradually enhancing his strength and power.

It was no exaggeration to say that this thesis had become a treasure trove for Link where he could pick out invaluable pieces of knowledge from it every once in a while.

Too bad there isn't any Elemental Pool here so I can't test the spell yet. Link was itching to try out the spell now, but he knew that it was a taboo thing among Magicians to test out new spells in public. He wasn't planning on becoming a laughing stock among the Magicians just because of some slight mistakes he might make in trying out a new spell.

Just as he was about to put down the textbook *The Flaming Hand* and was going to turn his attention to Bryant's *Scroll of Enlightenment*, a notification suddenly appeared on the interface.

Link found the notification slightly odd. It was one that he'd never seen before.

Would you like to simulate spellcasting?

"Simulate spellcasting?" Link was surprised. "Explain to me what it is."

The gaming system can assist the player by simulating the process of spellcasting in the realm of consciousness. This way the player can verify the feasibility and effectiveness of a spell.

"You can do that too?" asked Link, bewildered. "Why didn't you tell me earlier?" Link had to wait for his turn to use the Elemental Pool to learn the spell *Flame Blast*. Had the gaming system told him about such a magnificent feature that he could take advantage of, it would've saved him so much time.

Player's soul strength was not strong enough in the past. The simulation might cause some damage to the player's soul.

"Is it strong enough now, then?" Link asked. "When did it get stronger? Why didn't I notice it?"

When you confronted the Necromancer Shade, you surpassed your own limit. Then when you received the blessings of the Angel of Light, there was an ascension in the strength of your soul.

Link understood it now. He had broken through his own limits as he was fighting against the undead, that was why he had such a splitting headache then. Then Herrera had sacrificed parts of her own soul to help heal his soul, which made him recover not only to his previous strength but made it even stronger than before.

Seeing that it would take more than an hour to arrive at the Morani Castle, Link estimated that he would have enough time to master one spell in the meantime.

"Start spellcasting simulation now," he instructed the gaming system.

As soon as the words came out of his mouth, the spell structure of the Flaming Hand appeared right in front of him.

This was a Level-5 spell, so its spell structure was complex and intricate, much more than that of the Level-4 Flame Blast. The Flaming Hand was another spell that was based on runic light wheels. It contained five light wheels and there were more than a hundred runes on each wheel. If he used the same spellcasting technique as the one shown in the simulation earlier, Link estimated that he would spend 4 seconds on spellcasting even when he had already mastered it.

In real battles, taking four seconds to cast a spell was enough to create an opening for an Assassin or a Warrior to kill him more than ten times.

Then, Link saw clouds of red gas flowing from all directions into the bright red frame of spell structure, creating a giant Flaming Hand of which each finger was thicker than an elephant's leg. The hand was glowing white and there were spirals of red-hot flames surrounding it while its surface was roiling with heat waves. By the looks of it, if the hand was holding a man inside its palm, it could completely vaporize the man in less than a second.

In the field of vision, Link saw a red-colored atmosphere flowing in from all sides into this red magic structure, forming a large flame giant with a finger two times larger than the elephant's leg. The color of the hand was incandescent and surrounded by a red fire. The flame, on the outside, was a billowing heat wave.

"It's not bad, but it's just the regular version," said Link in his own realm of consciousness. "I'll modify it."

As soon as he had the idea, the Flaming Hand in front of him disappeared and turned into its basic spell structure. Link then began to modify it based on the ideas that he had when observing the regular version earlier.

He had been playing with the ideas of ways to modify the spell a dozen times in his head, so he took less than five minutes before a completely new spell structure was created.

After checking it one last time and confirming that there were no defects, Link said, "Simulate spellcasting."

The spell structure began to oscillate, and the red flames began to pour in. Soon afterwards, the Flaming Hand began to take shape and was about to come into its perfect form when suddenly there was a flash of light and the Flaming Hand scattered and collapsed.

Simulated casting failed. The new structure was flawed.

Link was not discouraged, though. He knew that it would take more than one trial to succeed.

"Can you repeat the process?" asked Link. "And make it slower too."

Yes.

And so, Link once again observed the whole process when the Flaming Hand collapsed. The speed was slowed down by 5 times so Link could very clearly see the whole process unfold and identify where it had gone wrong.

Link finally spotted all the flaws after a few seconds. He pondered on a solution for about three minutes, then started to make slight alterations. This time, he spent about ten minutes on it. After making sure that everything was in place, he once again said to the gaming system, "Simulate spellcasting."

The red gas flowed into the spell structure once again, but this time no accidents happened. The giant hand appeared, although its appearance slightly differed from the regular version. Its surface was still an incandescent white, but it was glowing very dimly and the roiling waves around it were now controlled. The barrier between the Flaming Hand and the air around it was now clear-cut. Additionally, there was a transparent force field around the giant hand.

This force field wrapped around each finger of the Flaming Hand. Under the influence of the fire elements on the force field, red rings of fire appeared around these fingers.

The texture of this novel Flaming Hand was similar to that of Link's Glass Orbs. The reason being that both spells condensed all of their fire elements tightly inside their cores.

Splendid, Link thought. Now I can completely control the flame and direct it to explode at the exact time that I wish it to. There are still some flaws here, though. The control of the flame's energy is still imperfect, but I can change that.

Link liked spells that he could control, which was why he had developed the Flame Blast with high target accuracy and the Glass Orb with almost all of its fire elements constrained inside the orb. Right now, he wished to create a modified version of the Flaming Hand of which he could completely tweak its surface temperature to his desire.

After the completion of its basic structure, he now began to make the final improvements to the spell.

It took him more than half an hour this time. After modifying it five times, Link was finally content.

Though half an hour might seem like a brief period of time, Link had actually spent more time because he was in the realm of his own consciousness. Because Magicians usually possess fast thinking speed, one second in the real world was like a hundred seconds in their realm of consciousness. Link, on the other hand, had such a lightning fast thinking speed that one second in the real world could be as long as 200 seconds in his realm of consciousness. Combined with the boost he received from the gaming system, that was how he managed to modify a spell in less than an hour.

"Now," said Link, "imprint this spell onto the Glyph of Soul."

Are you sure?

"Yes."

As soon as he made the reply Link felt as if something was slamming against his head. He could almost hear a clanging sound in his head, as if someone was hitting on a big brass bell. He had a throbbing headache when he finally regained consciousness. Nevertheless, the Flaming Hand's structure had been clearly imprinted in his mind and he could recall it with all its minute details in no time at all.

He had a feeling that as long as he triggered his Mana he could construct the structure of this Level-5 spell instantaneously. Then, a notification popped up on the interface.

Player acquired a new soul spell. Please name the spell.

"Call it... the Vulcan's Hand", replied Link. He had wanted to call it the Buddha's Palm but he thought it sounded too grandiose and arrogant to name a spell he created himself something like that.

Player successfully created a new Level-5 spell – the Vulcan's Hand. Player receives 10 Omni Points and now has 210 Omni Points in total.

Link took a quick glance at the notification then made it disappear. He rubbed his throbbing temple and closed his eyes to rest for a while. About ten minutes later the carriage gradually slowed down and came to a stop.

"Mr. Link," said the coachman, "we're at the castle gate now."

Link opened his eyes and peered out of the carriage window and discovered that he was now at the Hamilton family's castle gate. By now the guards on the castle wall had noticed the carriage approaching the moat, though they made no move to lower the bridge.

"Who goes there?" shouted one of the guards. "Report the name of the gentleman in the carriage!"

"Tell them it's Link Morani," said Link to the coachman, who then shouted the reply.

The guards on the castle wall were taken aback by the name given by the coachman. They knew that the Viscount's third son had left the castle to study magic a long time ago and were surprised at his sudden appearance now.

Why did the young master come back so suddenly? Did he hear that the old Viscount was sick in his bed and rushed back to make sure he got his share of the inheritance?

Chapter 150

The Flaming Hand (4)

The Morani Castle was located at the highest point in Puffer County. As long as one was standing in an open space with an unobstructed view, they could see the castle clearly.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon. Three Dark Elves carefully disguised as humans were traveling on horses along Hamilton Bridge. As they lifted their heads, they got a clear view of the castle.

The three of them were powerful and had excellent vision. Not only did they get a clear view of the castle, they also saw a turquoise carriage traveling up the hill towards the castle.

"Look, it's a carriage from the East Cove Higher Magic Academy. The person inside must be Link," Hedel spoke. They rushed here the moment they heard that Link was returning back home. The sight of a carriage bearing the academy's crest confirmed their suspicion.

"Quick, we'll go catch him now!" Norisa gripped his sword tightly.

"There is no hurry," Magician Parsons said as he looked at the distant carriage and castle. "This is his family castle where his loved ones reside. We have to deliver the greatest pain to him to avenge the princess. We will wait till its dusk before we sneak into the castle and kill his family members right in front of his eyes. Then, we will burn down his family castle and destroy everything he ever owned!"

"Fantastic!" Hedel smacked his lips in satisfaction. The Dark Elves were blessed children of the night. As an Assassin, he was thus the reaper when dusk fell.

Link's carriage moved towards the castle at a steady pace. While the Morani family was not well-known, the respective heads of the family had been lords for the past 300 years. There was a lot of thought put into the construction of the castle over all these years.

The perimeter of the castle was surrounded by a 15-foot-deep trench. As it was situated on higher ground, there was no water in the trench. Instead, the trench was deliberately filled with wooden spikes. The castle walls were made of a hardy material called Star Stone to defend against external attacks. The wall with the suspension bridge was further reinforced with magic runes. Link could tell in one look that those were anti-magic runes and sturdy runes. After entering the castle gate, one would be greeted by a plaza filled with weapons such as crossbows, catapults and other instrumentals in castle defense. The plaza was surrounded by another layer of tall walls and lead to the second castle gate.

If an enemy were to break through the first layer of defense, they would be trapped within the plaza and greeted by a deadly rain of arrows. There would be no escape.

As Link continued to observe the castle, he felt that the castle was simply a war fortress. If it was stocked with an adequate supply of food and some combat masters, it could probably serve as a defensive foothold for at least one and a half years.

At this moment, the carriage had arrived at the inner castle's courtyard. There was a small garden in the courtyard decorated with neatly trimmed greenery. This slightly dispelled the dark and humid atmosphere present in the castle. The main castle gate lay behind the courtyard. Link saw three people standing in front of the main gate, awaiting his arrival.

There were two women and one man. The two women were dressed in tattered and thin clothes, causing them to shiver in the cold winter. They constantly rubbed their hands against each other and stamped their feet to keep their bodies warm. As Link got closer, their facial features evoked Link's memory and he finally recognized them.

The women with the distressed and worried expression were Lilith, the mother of the true Link Morani. The disheveled lady beside her was his elder sister Molly, and the last person with a head of white hair was the housekeeper of the Morani family, Trevor.

Mother is in the castle? This is unexpected. Link thought. As for his eldest brother, it was normal for him to not appear due to his revolting temperament. Similarly, his second brother was a Kingdom Knight and was on duty at the Silver Fortress in the North. It was thus natural that he would not be around as well.

The carriage stopped right in front of the main gate. Link opened the door and alighted with grace.

Link did not want to be looked down upon by his family members. He wore his turquoise magic robe bearing the crest of the East Cove Higher Magic Academy and had two rings on his hand. One of them was an intricately designed ring bearing the defensive spell, Edelweiss. The second one was a ring given by the King that would affirm his status as a Duke. The Wand of Constellations he deliberately held in his hand also constantly emitted a mysterious and glorious glow.

This was extremely effective. Lilith's eyes lit up the moment she saw her son in this manner. She immediately felt relieved, the signs of distress previously shown on her face dissipated. His sister Molly had also regained some spirit, covering her mouth in shock. They probably did not expect their incompetent brother would grow this much. The contempt on Trevor's face had also greatly lessened, changing into that of respect and awe. He bowed and said, "Third young master."

"Is this really you, Link?" Molly doubted her own eyes. The Morani family had always placed emphasis on physical strength and walked the path of the knight. Link, who was frail and weak from young was thus despised.

However, the young man standing in front of them was lean and confident. He was dressed in a glorious robe and had the demeanor of an extremely powerful Magician. This was the exact opposite of the impression she had of her brother.

"It's me," Link smiled. Even though he did not hold special feelings towards these two women, memories of the true Link Morani were still present inside him. He couldn't help but feel some sort of intimacy.

He walked forward and hugged his sister and mother respectively. When he embraced his mother, Link found the poor woman trembling. He then looked at her and saw tears flowing down her cheek as she stared hard at him. She murmured, "That's good, my son has finally grown up. He looks promising."

Link felt a twinge of pain in his heart. He let out a small sigh before recollecting himself. He turned towards the coachman and handed him five gold coins. "Al, please take a rest. You will have to stay in the castle these few days. Sorry for the trouble."

The moment the coachman saw the gold coins, his eyes lit up. Five gold coins were the equivalent of six months of his earnings. He was elated and spoke with excitement, "Thank you, sir."

Housekeeper Trevor gasped at the sight, he gave the coachman five gold coins as a trip?

The entire Morani family merely had an annual income of 700 gold coins. With this income, they had to further split it amongst the 300 over people in the castle. The most generous reward the Duke offered in the past year was five silver coins. To think that Link could offer ten times that amount off the mark; it exceeded his expectations in every way.

The winter breeze was making the cold unbearable. Link could not watch as his mother and sister turned pale in the howling wind. He said, "Mother, sister, let's go in."

"Alright, alright." Lilith's only focus was on her son. She would follow whatever Link said.

As for Molly, she was similarly shocked by Link's lavish action. Her allowance for the entire year was merely six gold coins. She still remembered her struggle when she wanted to purchase a skirt that had cost one gold coin. It took her half a month to come to a decision. She clearly did not expect her brother to tip a coachman an amount that was almost equivalent to her yearly allowance. How extravagant!

She followed closely behind Link with a stunned expression, her eyes staring at her brother the whole time.

On the way, Link told the housekeeper, "I want to see my father, bring me there."

Trevor instinctively said, "The Duke is currently weak...no visitors are allowed."

That was far from the truth. While the Duke was indeed physically weak, it was Hamilton's eldest son, also the person next in line for the position of Duke, Wharton Morani's instruction that the third young master was not allowed to visit the seriously ill Duke.

The reason was simple. He was afraid some of the inheritance would go to Link.

In the past, Trevor would say these things with ease. However, before he could even complete his sentence this time, his speech was interrupted by Link's cold stare. There was not the slightest bit of emotion in those eyes. He immediately felt pressurized the moment their gaze met.

He panicked and sweat broke out on his forehead. He subconsciously muttered, "Third young master, this is your brother's order."

Link sneered. He knew exactly what Wharton was planning. The Morani family's inheritance was sparse to begin with. If Wharton had to split this inheritance with him, Wharton's portion would definitely become smaller. However, Link had no interest in such an insignificant inheritance.

He calmly spoke, "I request to see my father, and not my brother. Lead the way!"

"Yes..." Trevor found himself completely subservient to this young man and agreed immediately. The moment he spoke, he was horrified. Since when did the third master become so powerful. This is weird.

Now that he had agreed, there was no reason to delay the process. Trevor led the way with a pained expression.

When they reached the staircase, a figure appeared on the second floor. A voice came in that direction, "My dear brother, you have finally returned. I missed you so much."

Link looked up and saw a burly young man walked down the stairs.

The man was in his early thirties. He had shoulder-length brown curls and neatly trimmed stubble. He was well-built and wore a brand new black robe with a high-quality fur vest. His shoes were made of exquisite deer leather, and the accessories he wore were double the amount of the total his mother and sister wore altogether.

The sight of this person struck fear into the hearts of his mother and sister. They immediately bowed their heads like a deer shivering in the face of a lion.

This was the eldest brother of the true Link Morani, the successor to the throne, Wharton Morani.

He slowly walked down the stairs and observed Link with great interest. His smile grew wider by the minute and said, "My dear brother, it seems like you have learned your magic well. Look at your beautiful wand, let me have a look at it."

He then proceeded to grab the wand from Link without asking for his permission. This was an old habit. His third brother would never refuse his requests.

However, that was Link from the past.

This pampered bastard meant nothing to him now.

Link's mana surged into the wand, causing it to glow in a blinding light. Under the illumination of this light, Link looked at his arrogant brother and said, "This is not something you should be touching, Wharton."

A Magician's wand is like a Warrior's sword. It should never be in the possession of another person, not even for a moment.

Wharton's expression immediately changed. His face darkened and with his hands still stretched, the brilliance of a strong Battle Aura enveloped his body. He advanced forward, "Why is that so? Have my little brother lost all respect after learning some magic?"

He specialised in the Morani's family Ice Battle Aura and was already a Level-4 Warrior. He was confident that he would be considered a formidable foe even if his strength was compared across the Kingdom. On the other hand, his brother had only studied magic for less than a year.

How strong could a person get after merely a year of practice? The blinding light is probably just something flashy.

He then made an extremely unwise decision.

The next moment, a brilliant light enveloped Link's body and a Level-4 Edelweiss spell was instantly released. Link controlled the energy field carefully and made sure not to injure his mother, sister and the housekeeper. However, on Wharton's side, he deliberately enhanced the strength of the forcefield.

Boom! Wharton was caught unguarded and his whole body was knocked back.

"You little punk! How dare you attack me!" Wharton was enraged. He had been holding the reins in the Morani family for a few years. Even his father dared not go against his will, much less his third brother who had always been meek and frail. To think that he could retaliate!

The anger inside him was overflowing. He charged forward following an explosion of his Battle Aura. He had to teach this disobedient brother a lesson!

Chapter 151

The Flaming Hand (5)

At the Morani Castle.

Wharton was so enraged that he'd lost all his reasoning capabilities. All he wanted to do now was to attack Link somehow.

Link was quite surprised at the degree of his brother's wrath. He'd always known that Wharton had a bad temper and that he was always the boss in the castle where his words were the law. But he didn't expect Wharton to descend to such a tyrannical point. This was no longer just haughtiness and arrogance – it was madness!

Link felt he must teach Wharton a lesson in place of their father, in case one day he might step on the wrong toes and cause irreversible damage to the family.

It was true that Wharton was a Level-4 Warrior, but he wasn't holding any weapons at the moment, and neither was he wearing his armor. Link, on the other hand, had a whole arsenal of spells at his beck and call to choose from – Glass Orb, Whistle, or even Flame Blast – either one of these would've killed Wharton in less than a second.

But of course he couldn't, and wouldn't, do that. After considering it for a while Link decided to use the latest spell he'd learned – the modified version of the Flaming Hand, Vulcan's Hand. This spell would completely overpower his bastard of a brother and immobilize him without hurting him.

But then, just as Link had come to his decision, a figure appeared out of nowhere and was lunging towards Link and Wharton. The figure's body was shrouded in Battle Aura of exactly the same color as Wharton's, only even more intense.

It turned out that the figure wasn't aiming at Link, though. Instead, the mysterious figure went straight for Wharton.

Wharton was caught unaware himself and didn't have the time to defend himself from the assailant. He was forced to step backwards for five or six steps, after which the assailant pinned him down against the wall behind him.

Wharton did not expect it to be shocked, and then he was knocked back by the figure. He took five or six steps back and was finally hit by the figure on the wall.

It was then that Link could finally make out who this figure was. He was over six feet tall with a body as sturdy as a bear and a rough and craggy appearance that seemed to be about 25 years old. He was Link's second brother, Clyde Morani.

"This is the first time we three brothers are reunited back at home," he said angrily, staring straight into Wharton's eyes, "yet this is how you, the eldest brother, welcome us?"

"You bastard, let me go!" By now Wharton had calmed down slightly. He continued to struggle but Clyde had eased his grip on him. Soon enough Clyde let his brother go and took a few steps away from him.

Now that Wharton was free from Clyde's grasp, he suppressed the burning rage inside him with all his might and shot daggers at him with his stare. Then he straightened his clothes and turned back to Link.

"So you think you can play me like a puppet now that you've learned a few tricks in the magic academy, huh?" sneered Wharton. "Don't you forget that I'm the master of this castle and no one is allowed to disobey or disrespect me. If you've got a problem with that then you're welcome to bugger off!"

Then Wharton turned around and strutted out of the hall without waiting for Link's reply.

Link frowned deeply as he massaged his eyebrows. In this brief interaction with his eldest brother he could clearly see that Wharton was pompous and arrogant, impulsive and impatient, and worst of all, ignorant and unwilling to compromise his needs for anyone else. In short, he was just like those typical spoiled sons of noblemen.

Meanwhile, Link's second brother Clyde apparently couldn't stand Wharton as well as he spat on the spot where Wharton had stood.

"Sooner or later the family will fall in his hands!" shouted Clyde.

He was a knight of the kingdom who was stationed in the White Silver Fortress which was a hundred miles north of the Black Iron Fortress, and the second largest fortress in the kingdom.

He had heard that his father had fallen seriously ill, so he asked for special permission by the captain to come home in time for the Winter Veil Festival. He'd also got wind of the rumors about his little brother on his way back that he had shown exceptional progress in his magic skills and was about to come home as well. So, Clyde was very much looking forward to seeing everyone back together for the first time in a long while.

Although he hadn't liked Link much in the past, it was only because he despised his little brother's weakness and passivity. He would never bully Link himself. Now that he was a knight of the kingdom and had been stationed away from home for a long time, he had started to value the unity and strength of the family even more than he had ever done.

The reason was simple. If the bond within your family wasn't strong or if none of your family members was a prominent figure, you could be easily manipulated by another more powerful family and be robbed of all you had.

The appearance of a prominent figure within a family depended entirely on luck, which was very hard to alter. The unity among the family members, though, could be worked upon. This was the reason why Clyde highly valued the importance of love and harmony in maintaining the strength and position of the family.

And yet, the first thing he saw after rushing back home was the sight of his elder brother in all his arrogance bullying his little brother in front of the rest of the family. This angered him very much and triggered him to act out in the way he did.

Now that Wharton had left, Clyde then calmed himself down for a while and turned to his little brother.

"Not bad, kid," he remarked.

Clyde had been out in the world for many years, so his mind had been broadened unlike Wharton who had remained here all his life. Clyde could easily see from that little trick his little brother had used on Wharton that Link's spellcasting was impressively swift. He even had a decent control of the spell that he cast. To have achieved this much within a year was really not bad at all.

However, in Clyde's view, Link's magic aura was still very dim, so his level mustn't be all that high at present. He'd managed to fend off Wharton probably because the latter

had been caught off guard. Still, it was more than enough for now. They finally had a Magician within the Morani family, and this pleased Clyde very much.

Link, on the other hand, had known Clyde to be a frivolous man who loved to chase after women. He remembered how he would flirt and try to court every beautiful lady he met. But apart from that there was no serious flaw in him at all. He'd ignored Link in the past but had never done anything to make his life miserable the way Wharton had been, so Link had no hard feelings for Clyde at all. He saw Clyde smiling at him so his expressions softened as well and finally ceased the Edelweiss shield.

"It's just a little trick I learned," he told Clyde with a smile. He then turned to his mother and patted her hand gently. She was pale and shaken by what had just happened.

"It's alright, Mother," Link reassured her, "Wharton was just confused for a moment."

"I heard Trevor say that father's body is getting weaker," said Link. "Is he ill? What happened?" He hadn't received any news from home lately and had no idea at all what was going on within the household.

"Father fell off a horse two weeks ago," said Clyde, his face now turned grave and glum. "He was relatively fine when it happened, but his injuries worsened the next day. The priest had visited him several times now but there still wasn't much improvement in his conditions. I hear his body was too weak to withstand a strong healing divine spell."

The basis of divine spells was to stimulate the body's own potential to repair and heal itself. The priest would only say someone could no longer withstand a healing spell when that person was nearing their limit and could no longer be saved.

Link was understandably shocked at this revelation. He hadn't expected to come back at such a crucial time. He'd assumed that Wharton was preventing himself from seeing the Viscount because he didn't want Link to develop a close relationship with their father. But now it seemed that he might just be worried about the old man's health and didn't want Link to disturb him. Now it's no wonder why Wharton's temper had been so explosive.

"Let's go see him," said Link.

Clyde nodded, and the two brothers then made for the old Viscount's room together.

Their father's room was on the second floor of the castle just a few steps away from where they were. Just as they were approaching the door, Link saw the priest walking out of the room followed by the castle's servant, though they didn't seem to notice the two brothers approaching yet.

"The Lord of Light has summoned the Viscount," said the priest to the servant, "he might stay alive for another week but no longer. You must all be prepared for what might happen soon."

Clyde had heard the priest's every word loud and clear. He quickly rushed up to him in long strides.

"Is there no way to save him at all?" he asked with a pleading voice.

The priest was initially shocked at Link and Clyde's presence. He then looked around and realized that they were all members of the Viscount's family, so he shook his head gently in reply, with an expression on his face that signified helplessness.

"The Viscount is already unconscious and his Life Aura is now almost extinguished," he said. "I'm afraid I am powerless against the will of the Lord of Light."

The priest then gave a slight bow and left.

Clyde let out a long sigh and they all stood there silently. The two brothers then entered the Viscount's room. Link saw his white-haired father lying almost lifelessly like a sheet of paper on the king-sized, carved oak bed. His breathing was irregular and very slow, and his face was ashen and pale. He didn't look much different from a corpse.

Link knew at a glance that the priest had overstated his father's condition. By the looks of it, the Viscount wouldn't last much longer than three days, and there was no longer any hope that he would ever rise from his coma. Wharton shouldn't have bothered preventing him from seeing his father as it would've made no difference at all.

The two brothers stayed in their father's room for a while without uttering a single word. They still stayed silent as they walked out of the room. Link didn't exactly feel sad, but he did feel the depressive air that was clouding the atmosphere.

They then passed the time wordlessly for a while. Then the clock chimed six in the evening – it was now dinnertime in the Morani castle.

Although Link's eldest brother wasn't exactly keen on celebrating his return to the castle, he still ordered the servants to serve up quite a lavish meal for everyone.

There were only five people in the dining hall – the three Morani brothers, Molly and Link's mother Lilith. Wharton sat at the head of the dining table while Clyde was sitting on his right. Link took a seat in the middle of the table's length. He then turned to his mother and sister and was shocked to find that they were standing aside timidly with uncertainty, looking at Wharton as if afraid of his disapproval.

"What are you standing there for?" Wharton barked. "Sit down!"

Only then did Lilith and Molly dare to take their seats. Link frowned at this sight as it made him suspect that Molly and his mother weren't even allowed to sit at the same table with Wharton when he wasn't home. It was only his speculation, though, so Link decided not to say anything about it for now.

A few minutes later, Wharton broke the silence of the dining hall.

"Molly," he began, taking his time with each word, "Father's health is deteriorating as we speak, we mustn't delay the engagement any longer. It is what he had decided on before he collapsed into unconsciousness."

Molly was slowly cutting up the venison steak on her plate when she shuddered suddenly at the mention of the engagement. Her face instantly turned white as a sheet and she was so upset that not a sound escaped from her lips.

Lilith seemed like she had something to say but she stopped herself before she opened her mouth. The doleful crease between her eyebrows was even deeper now.

"Wharton," said Link after putting down the knife in his hand, no longer able to hold in his thought, "what engagement are you talking about? Why don't I know anything about this?"

Wharton harrumphed and continued to chew the piece of meat in his mouth slowly, making no haste to answer Link's questions.

"It is father's decision," he said finally. "The man asking for Molly's hand is the eldest son, Baron Arrow from Delta County. It is father's last wish."

"No!" Molly shrieked suddenly, finally finding her voice. "It is not father's wish! You've

coaxed him into it!" Her eyes were just as deep and dark as Link's and they were now brimming with tears, making them look just like pools of ink.

She then turned to Link and looked straight into his eyes.

"That Delta County Baron's eldest son is a madman!" she told him. "He suffered a serious injury from a horse-riding accident and ever since then he's been torturing women for pleasure. He's had three wives and they all died because of his barbarous treatment! I will never marry a man like that!"

Molly had been observing her brother ever since he arrived. She found that there was something different about him now that made her trust him even more than she ever did when he was just her baby brother. He seemed much more like a leader and a reliable man. She might just be grasping at straws, but she felt that only Link could save her from this cruel fate.

The crease between Link's brows deepened as he listened to his sister, though he made no replies and just sat there brooding. Wharton, on the other hand, couldn't take it much longer.

"Shut up!" he yelled as he slammed a fist onto the table.

Molly stopped speaking immediately and bit her lips so hard they started to bleed, though she dared not defy her brother's command. He was still the most powerful man in the castle after all.

Wharton sniggered derisively, then he turned to Link.

"My dear brother," he said, "Baron Arrow is so kind to welcome our sister into his household without a dowry. Not only that, he even offered us a thousand gold coins in return. His son may have misbehaved from time to time but I'm sure he's no madman. Molly will be fine as long as she is careful. Anyway, this is what father wanted."

Link paid no heed to Wharton's words. He looked over to his mother and sister and saw how one was sorrowful and the other tearful. Link put down the fork in his hand and wiped his mouth with the napkin beside his plate. He knew what he should do now.

"I disapprove of the arrangement," said Link.

Wharton was visibly seething with anger, his eyes bulged out as if they were about to explode out of his head.

"Come on, let's not quarrel," Clyde interrupted. "We'll talk about it after the meal. Let's enjoy the food for now, alright?"

Wharton snorted at Clyde's remarks. He still resented his brother for the opportunity he had to go off into the world and become a chivalrous knight while he was stuck in this castle.

"My dear brother," he began, "you mustn't forget that your armor and weapons had cost the family 1500 gold coins. That's three years' worth of our income! Think of how much our family had to sacrifice for you, we've even gone into debts with –"

"Alright, that's enough!" Clyde slammed his knife and fork onto the table and stomped out of the dining hall. He had no plan to stay there and suffer through another one of Wharton's dreadful lectures.

Wharton burst out in laughter like a child who'd just won a fight. Now it's time to deal with the other younger brother.

"The decision is final," he told Link. "What you think of it means nothing whatsoever."

"I think you've got it wrong, brother," said Link with a laugh. "I wasn't telling you what I think, I will act on it too. I will bring my mother and Molly back with me."

"Don't be silly!" Wharton retorted disdainfully. "How do you plan to take care of them? You're just a Magician's Apprentice who's only been learning magic for a year. I doubt if you could even take care of yourself! What...what is that?"

"You obviously haven't noticed this ring on my finger, have you?" said Link, smiling as he raised his hand to show Wharton the Baron seal from the king. "King Leon has given me this ring as proof that I am now a Baron with my own estate. Now that father will soon be gone, I will bring my mother and Molly back to my estate with me and take care of them myself."

Link's words hit Wharton like a ton of bricks as he sat there dumbstruck and unable to make any reply. Meanwhile, Link's mother and Molly's eyes shone with jubilant surprise.

Just then, they were interrupted by Clyde's urgent scream from the outside of the castle.

"We're under attack!"

Chapter 152

The Flaming Hand (6)

The Morani family's castle.

Clyde was in a state of depression when he came out of the dining hall.

While it looked glamorous being a Kingdom Knight, a knight with a noble background had to pay for his own armor. In order to preserve the reputation of the Morani family, the old Duke spent a huge amount on his set of magic armor.

When he started using this set of armor, Clyde indeed received stares of admiration. However, as his military achievements had not been outstanding these five years, he did not receive many rewards for his actions, and was thus still wearing his old armor.

The magic formation on his armor had lost its effects a long time ago. Furthermore, the armor also looked dilapidated from all the repairs and wars it had been through these years. Clyde looked nothing like a Knight of noble descent wearing it.

But he still had to wear it, making him a target for ridicule.

His years of experience on the battlefield had allowed him to ignore these condescending stares and voices. Putting those aside, he had been looking forward to returning home, hoping that his family would make him feel better. Little did he expect that his family was also in shambles.

His elder brother was only concerned about his inheritance and position, his younger brother had become defiant after learning magic, his sister was not sensible and his father was on his deathbed. These series of unfortunate events weighed on Clyde's heart like a heavy stone. He wished to find something that he could release his rage onto.

He continued moving forward past the courtyard to the outer plaza and then climbed the castle wall. It was snowing, causing the air to be cool and refreshing. Looking out from the highest point of the city walls, a panoramic view of Puffer County could be seen.

Clyde took a deep breath and immediately felt better.

At that moment, he saw two horses riding towards the castle in the distant. Who would visit at this hour? As he thought to himself, the two figures quickly arrived at the suspension bridge.

"Open the door, we are special envoys from King Leon. We are here to find Magician Link." A voice rang from below the suspension bridge.

The castle guards looked at Clyde, waiting for his approval.

While Clyde had his doubts, they were merely two individuals. Furthermore, they were acquainted with Link and claimed to be King Leon's envoys. There should be no harm in letting them in. If they were lying, the over 200 soldiers in the castle would be enough to give them a memorable lesson.

"Open the door," Clyde ordered.

With the clicking and clacking sounds of the wheels, the suspension bridge was slowly lowered. The two figures waited patiently for the bridge to be completely lowered before making their way in.

The clatter of the horses' hooves became more prominent as they traveled on the bridge into the castle. Everything looked fine.

Quickly, the two figures reached the gear hinges of the suspension bridge.

At that moment, everything changed.

A wooden stick suddenly appeared in the hands of one of the figures. As he pointed it at the hinge, the gears around it shattered. The suspension bridge now could not be closed!

This was a Magician. He destroyed the bridge with his spells!

Clyde was horrified and immediately unsheathed his sword, yelling, "Infiltration!"

His years of fighting experience had told him that Magicians were the hardest to deal with in battle. One must never lose focus when fighting against them. In order to secure a victory, one should either plan a sneak attack or wait till he exhausted all his

energy. Now that the sneak attack was impossible, they had to go with the latter.

He immediately ordered, "Shoot your arrows! Kill them!"

The enemy was at the plaza, surrounded by the tall castle walls. There were no lesser than 50 soldiers on the castle walls raining arrows down on them. This would surely deal some damage to the enemy.

However, the moment Clyde gave his command, one of the figures was suddenly enveloped in a blue light. This light was peculiar. It started as a soft hue enveloping the Magician before spiraling outwards in a radius of 15 feet. At the 15 feet mark, the light stabilized and many mysterious patterns could be seen flowing in the light dome. These patterns were similar to thorns but were more exquisite and abstruse.

When this light appeared, the two figures accelerated and went across the 90 feet plaza in a second. In the blink of an eye, they reached the gate leading to the courtyard.

The speed was so fast that they managed to dodge all the arrows fired by the soldiers. The inner gate leading to the courtyard was also left wide open as they had no time to close it.

Clyde's eyes widened at this sight and had a look of disbelief. "It's the Blue Thorn Battle Aura!"

The Ice Blue Thorn Battle Aura was a Legendary style that originated from the book, Battle Tactics of the Blue Thorn. It was a secret trade of the Silver Moon Dark Elves, specifically the Norigan Familia.

This Battle Aura was extremely powerful and would surround the user with a halo of thorns. This halo had two functions: one was to greatly increase the speed of the user and his comrades, while the other was to repel the enemy's attacks.

Warriors who mastered this battling style would be able to face five other Warriors of a similar level without getting defeated. The more allies the user had, the stronger the battle aura would be. If there was a Knight in the Calvary team who had this Battle Aura, the combat strength of the entire troop would increase exponentially!

That was the reason why Battle Tactics of the Blue Thorn was termed as one of the ten Legendary Battle Aura books of the Firuman Continent.

It was rumored that there were several versions of this Battle Aura. However, they all shared a similarity which was that this Battle Aura itself was extremely selective. This was true even for the most basic version. If the soldier was not talented enough, forcing the Battle Aura on him would not only be ineffective, but also damaging in some cases. It was said that even the eldest daughter of the Norigan Familia did not make the cut to learn this Battle Aura.

The person in front of him was exactly the unique talent that managed to master this art.

Clyde felt a chill down his spine the moment he recognized this Battle Aura. "These two people are definitely Dark Elves. But why would such powerful Dark Elves appear in Puffer County?"

He had a premonition that the Morani Family would not be able to escape their impending doom.

The moment this thought surfaced in his mind, hysterical screams echoed through the castle. Clyde spun his head and saw a shadow moving at an unimaginable speed through the mist. When he swept past a soldier, the soldier would either grab his neck or heart with a pained expression before collapsing. Despite the lack of light, Clyde could still clearly see warm blood gushing out of the wounds.

"It's an Assassin!" It was too late to stop the two figures that charged through the plaza. He hollered and rushed towards the direction of the Assassin.

His entire family would be killed if he continued to stay out of the fight!

He unleashed his Battle Aura and reached the Assassin within three charges.

At this moment, he saw a black aura enveloping the Assassin, whose hands were already stained red from the countless lives he took. When Clyde reached his side, he had just removed a dagger from a soldier's heart. The blood spurted a distance of three feet and some of them even splattered onto his face. He licked the blood off his face with a bloodthirsty gaze.

"Go to hell!" Clyde growled and swung his sword.

There was no collision. The Assassin was extremely nimble and managed to dodge his attack with ease. He then charged forward, aiming his dagger at Clyde's heart.

Clyde immediately retracted his sword to defend himself.

The collision still did not occur. The Assassin spun the dagger in the middle of the attack and Clyde felt a blow to the back of his head. He instantly felt dizzy and lost all strength, staggering forward for a few steps before collapsing onto the ground.

A raspy voice sounded behind him, "You will die, but not now."

In order to exact revenge for the princess, he would kill the Magician's family members right in front of him!

Clyde was horrified. He felt extremely weak, so much so that he couldn't even move his fingers. This should be due to the effect of his opponent's Battle Aura, which destroyed his bodily functions.

He could only lay helplessly on the ground as he watched the Assassin massacre the soldiers. He even saw the two figures who charged through the plaza.

They had already reached the castle courtyard, where more screams of terror could be heard. They were merciless and extremely efficient, evident from the frequency of the screams.

Clyde was trembling when he thought, they are here to find third brother. But how did brother provoke the Silver Moon Familia? To think that he attracted such powerful enemies. Will this be the end of the Morani Family?

...

The Dining Hall

Link and Wharton immediately stood up upon hearing the warning siren.

Wharton shouted, "Bring me my sword!"

He was a Level-4 Warrior, a powerful foe by normal standards. If anyone was insolent enough to attack his castle, they would have to bear the brunt of his sword.

The servant immediately brought him his sword. It was an intricately designed sword decorated with rubies as large as pigeon's eggs.

Wharton heroically rushed out of the castle the moment he got the sword.

Link felt strange. The terrifying amount of screams suggested that the enemy was strong. Link then turned around and ordered Housekeeper Trevor, "Bring mother and sister to the wine cellar."

Trevor hastily replied, "Yes."

Lilith threw a worried glance at her son and said, "What about you?"

"There is an infiltration. Naturally, I will have to deal with them. Don't worry mother, they are not strong enough to defeat me."

"But you have only studied magic for a year." Molly was still pretty knowledgeable. According to normal standards, one year was barely enough to lay the foundation for the practice of magic.

"Stop babbling! Quick! Move!" Link's face sank.

As the two women were fairly soft-spoken and meek, they immediately gave in to Link's pressure and followed obediently behind the housekeeper to the cellar.

However, they barely walked a few steps before a scream sounded at the entrance of the dining hall. Following which, a figure flew into the room. This unexpected event caused the two women to scream subconsciously.

Link stared at the figure and was surprised to find out that it was Wharton.

The elegant robe he had worn was now tattered. He suffered many injuries on his arms and legs and was drenched in blood. Every single attack seemed to accurately sever his arteries, causing huge amounts of blood to gush out from the wounds. He could only helplessly lay on the ground and moan in pain.

Link frowned and materialized his staff before heading out of the dining hall.

Two figures appeared at the front door. More accurately, it was the two Dark Elves. One of them was a Warrior, while the other was a Magician. The Warrior's sword was stained with blood. It seemed like Wharton's injuries were caused solely by him.

"Leave! They are extremely strong!" Wharton shouted. He seemed to still have a

conscience in times of emergency.

Link pretended that he did not hear Wharton. Sensing no eagerness to attack from his opponent, Link maintained his sitting position and placed his Wand of Constellations on the table. He then spoke coldly, "Two distinguished guests, would it be possible that I move my family to a safer place?"

The Dark Elves were definitely here for the incident of the Silver Moon's Three Musketeers. This battle would not end until one side was completely eliminated. From the tactics they used to torment Wharton, it could be seen that they harbored intense hatred towards Link and had great confidence in their abilities.

Since he was their target, the opponent probably would make him their first priority. It hence did not matter if his family were to be moved to a safer position until he was defeated.

Sure enough, the Dark Elf Warrior nodded, "It is possible. However, they cannot leave this hall. We have to let them view the glorious sight of your demise."

Link still maintained a calm expression and waved his hands at the shivering servants behind him, "Help the master up and bandage his wounds."

The servants immediately did as they were told.

At this moment, another Dark Elf appeared at the dining hall entrance. This Dark Elf was an Assassin and carried a person in his hands. It was his second brother Clyde.

Link then pointed at him and said, "Let him view the battle from the sidelines."

The Assassin looked at his comrades with a puzzled expression. Parsons then said, "Throw this person to the corner. Let him use his full strength."

Their aim was to defeat Link even when he was giving his all. Only then would he suffer true despair.

Hedel nodded and threw Clyde more than 60 feet away with just a slight fling of his hand, all the way to the inner wall of the inner hall.

Free of all constraints, Link could finally battle with ease.

Chapter 153

Where Do You Think You're Going?

Although he was ready to make his move, Link still had to choose his timing carefully.

He wore a faint smile on his face as he sat calmly at the table, looking nothing like a man preparing for a battle to the death. Once Clyde's wounds were properly dressed by the servants, Link reached out his hand and tapped it gently on the table. He then turned to address the Dark Elves.

"Gentlemen," said Link, speaking slowly and clearly, "may I ask for the name of the person you are avenging? Is it Felidia? Ainos? Or is it the swordswoman Alina?"

The three Dark Elves were visibly agitated at the mention of the last name. The Warrior Norisa immediately stepped forward with his sword glowing in an icy-blue light, and the Blue Thorn Battle Aura was now activated as well.

"Listen closely, you bastard," he said, "we are avenging the death of Lady Alina!"

"Ah, so you're Prince Norigan's errand boys," replied Link. "Well then, prepare to die!"

Right at that moment, Link launched his attacks! Three Whistles suddenly appeared and headed straight for the three Dark Elves. Link had been quietly constructing Whistle's spell structure while he struck up a conversation with the Dark Elves to buy some time. He didn't just cast one Whistle in this brief window of time though, but three, each on for each of the Dark Elves!

As for the wand that remained untouched on the table – well, who said that Magicians must hold the wand in their hand to use it? Link was controlling it easily with just his Mana without the need to physically touch it at all.

The three Whistles hissed through the air with a piercing, high-pitch noise. Their speed was unimaginably fast, so fast that they reached a few feet away from the three Dark Elves within a tenth of a second.

Link had cast the modified version of Whistle that he and Eliard had been discussing

and finally came up with. The power of the new version of Whistle was at least three times that of the original one.

The three Dark Elves could not have foreseen such a sudden attack. They were all caught off-guard and had no time think of a way to counterattack. All they managed to do was unleash a defensive shield.

Although Ainos' Blue Thorn Battle Aura was able to deflect attacks to some degree, it was most effective in close combat and not long-distance attacks like Link's spells, so he instinctively raised his sword to block the oncoming Whistle.

The Magician Parson, on the other hand, immediately cast a Level-4 shield spell around his body to protect himself.

Only the Assassin Hedel thought he would be smart enough to avert the attack from Link. He used Flash to step aside, hoping to dodge away from Link's Whistle.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The three Whistles exploded almost simultaneously and they were followed by a scream of pain. Who was the one screaming? It was no other than the only Dark Elf who was confident in his own skills to evade Link's attacks – Hedel.

Yes, Hedel was a Level-5 Assassin and his speed was indeed unimaginably fast. Still, he wasn't fast enough compared to Link's reaction speed.

Link had initially aimed each Whistle at each of the Dark Elves when he cast the spells, and all three of them had sensed Link's murderous intent so they each made the moves to protect themselves. But just as the Dark Elves were making their moves, Link had changed the trajectories of all three Whistles at the very last moment – he aimed all of them at the one with the weakest defense, Hedel.

Link remembered a well-known war strategy in his previous life that you must always do the exact opposite of what your opponent expected you to do in order to win a war or a battle. He used that principle just now to completely catch the Dark Elves unaware.

Link couldn't possibly be this dexterous with other spells for now, but he'd been using Whistle for long enough that his depth of understanding of the spell was unfathomable.

Link hadn't directed the three Whistles to follow Hedel. Instead, he had directed them towards the direction that he predicted the Assassin to run to and detonated it there!

For a moment the whole place was lit up by the flames of the explosions and metal fragments scattered about all around Hedel's body. The Assassin was wearing a thin anti-magic leather armor that protected him from most of the force of the impact. Yet, they did nothing to protect him from the countless metal fragments that resulted from the blasts.

Thousands of metal fragments pierced through Hedel's armor and skin. His body was now covered with gaping wounds while his face was pockmarked with bloody gashes. Not only was blood spewing out of his body everywhere, both of his eyes were now nothing more than two bleeding holes.

As expected, though, the Level-5 Assassin possessed a strong survival instinct. Although his wounds were grave, Hedel still managed to cling on to life and escaped death. He'd even remained on his feet even though both of his eyes were now blinded. Link would no longer be facing any threats from him now, and he was finally able to breathe a little easier as one dangerous opponent out of three had been practically eliminated.

Just then, the Magician Parson and the Warrior Norisa began their counterattacks.

Although they were stunned for a moment by Link's unexpected attacks, they had no time to help Hedel. Once they realized that Link had played a trick on them, they went straight into attacking mode and charged towards Link.

Norisa used the Battle Skill, Charge to rush up towards Link. He didn't have a shield with him, but he was wearing a light chain mail and had the protection of the Blue Thorn Aura. At that moment, he was like a war chariot that barged through everything in his path – the table, the chairs and the wooden planks on the floor were all left in pieces in his trail.

He was only about seventy feet away from Link – with his speed, even with the furniture in the hall in his way, Norisa could reach him within half a second.

Meanwhile, Parson took a step back to get himself behind the Warrior Norisa. He then began to construct a spell structure. With Norisa's help, he would have just enough time to cast a powerful spell, so he chose the Level-3 spell, Ice Spear!

He was most familiar with this spell, so he could cast it at the lightning speed of 0.4 seconds. He'd also modified it with Supreme Magical Skill so its power was increased to Level-4, making it the best choice for a battle with such an unpredictable opponent.

In the face of the Dark Elves' counterattack, Link did two things.

First of all, he activated the Edelweiss shield with his magic ring. This Level-4 defensive spell was not the most necessary step, but Link activated it nonetheless just in case. Although it might not be able to completely block the Dark Elves' attacks, the force field might slow them down and reduce their power if they managed to break through the shield, which would give him extra time to react.

Secondly, he activated the Level-5 spell engraved in the Glyph of Soul – the Vulcan's Hand!

It was Link's first time using the Glyph of Soul in a real battle. It felt wonderful. The moment his intention to cast the spell emerged in his mind he felt momentarily stunned and the complicated spell structure of the Flaming Hand that had been modified with Supreme Magical Skill appeared immediately at the tip of his wand.

The Level-5 Domingo Crystal was right at the end of Link's wand and it was filled with fire elements inside it. Once the Vulcan's Hand's spell structure appeared near it the fire element inside the crystal flowed rapidly to fill the spell structure, and in no time at all, the formidable Level-5 spell was completed. It took Link no more than 0.1 second – even less time than a blink of an eye!

By then, Norisa had only reached 30 feet away from Link when he saw a giant hand appear right in front of his eyes. It was glowing faintly in white and its size was ridiculously huge. Each finger of the hand was even bigger than his thigh and was encircled by rings of red, hot flame.

As the giant hand appeared, it rushed towards Norisa with an astonishing force and an even more frightening speed despite its size. Even before it could reach him, Norisa could already feel the roiling heat that came from the hand and it made his knees wobble in fear.

What kind of monstrous spell is this? Norisa's face was now as pale as a ghost and there was but one thought in his mind – run!

But no matter how fast he was, he could never outrun the Vulcan's Hand, which was

made up almost entirely of fire elementals. The fire element has no weight therefore it had no inertia, and so could accelerate from the stationary state to the speed of a storm in no time at all. It was also able to change directions swiftly as Link willed it without a hitch. The Vulcan's Hand might be colossal in size, but it was still surprisingly agile and quick.

Soon enough, the Warrior Norisa was caught within the grasp of the giant fiery hand!

The Vulcan's hand was so colossal in size that the Warrior now looked just like a tiny mouse. He was now completely engulfed by the flames and one couldn't see a trace of him from the outside.

At the same time, all Norisa could see now was a red sea of flame all around him. He found that he couldn't move at all because the fiery hand was exerting an enormous pressure on him. What was even scarier was the rapid speed at which it was closing in on him.

"The bastard is going to roast me to death!" Norisa then concentrated all of his force and energy to activate the Blue Thorn Battle Aura in a single explosion and the aura around him suddenly burst into a brightness that was three times its normal intensity.

Bang!

It turned out that Norisa wasn't too shabby at all. With that explosive burst of his Battle Aura, he managed to smash and disperse the fire elements in the Level-5 Vulcan's Hand!

Yet it didn't come without a cost to the Warrior. His clothes were now burnt to tatters, and the anti-magic chain mail armor was now glowing red and almost destroyed. His hair was now completely consumed by fire and his whole body was blackened by smoke.

By then, not only was he no longer able to charge on, it had taken all of his energy just to stay conscious and aware under such scorching temperatures. No matter how strong he was, he would need at least a few seconds to regain his composure and make an attack.

At this point, the Magician Parson finally completed the Ice Spear. Spiraling spears of ice then shot out from the tip of his wand and headed towards Link.

The Ice Spears were about seven-feet-long and as thick as an egg. It spiraled rapidly as it flew towards Link at a terrifying speed. If Link was hit by the spear, even the Level-4 Edelweiss shield would not completely protect him from its impact, and that would give the Dark Elves an opening to follow up with another attack.

Still, Link had his own way to deal with this.

Once again, he triggered the Glyph of Soul and was momentarily stunned, then the intricate structure of the Vulcan's Hand appeared at the tip of his wand. There the fire elements scattered by Norisa recently was then gathered and took the form of a new giant fiery hand.

The Ice Spear was only halfway in its trajectory when the new Vulcan's Hand was fully formed, and they both slammed into each other in an explosive clash of elements.

The Vulcan's Hand was initially glowing dimly, but once it came in contact with the Ice Spear it burst out in a brilliant light. The Ice Spear then instantaneously became a mist of vapor.

What else would you expect when a mere Level-3 ice spell hit a Level-5 fire spell?

With the Ice Spear vaporized, the fingers of the Vulcan's Hand curled up like a cow's tongue and promptly swallowed the Warrior Norisa who disappeared into its palm.

Then, without any hesitation at all, Link immediately raised the temperature of the Vulcan's Hand, especially in its palm area. The giant fiery hand then brightened so much that everyone in the hall was almost blinded.

This meant that the temperature of the Vulcan's Hand had been raised to a blistering degree!

This time, there was no way that Norisa could ever escape the Vulcan's Hand's grasp. In fact, the spell had re-emerged so quickly – within 0.2 seconds – that he hadn't even had time to recover from the previous attack yet.

Then, an inhuman scream could be heard coming from the inside of the Vulcan's Hand. It was a ghastly scream, but it was brief and abruptly ended.

Needless to say, it was the sound of Norisa getting burned to death.

Right now, out of the three Dark Elves, one was dead, and one had been incapacitated. The Magician was the only one left standing now. All this had happened within three seconds – the time for the average person to breathe in and out!

Another second passed, and the Vulcan's Hand in the great hall opened up its palm again, from which a charred body that looked like a big lump of coal came tumbling out. As the corpse hit the floor, it crumbled into countless smaller pieces – the powerful Level-5 Warrior was now nothing more than clumps of coal and ashes.

Wharton gulped at the horrifying scene before him. He now realized that his brother had been merciful to him when he attacked Link earlier in the day.

Meanwhile, Clyde's eyes were as wide as saucers as he stared at his little brother who hadn't moved an inch from his position at the dining table as if the dinner hadn't even been interrupted at all. He couldn't imagine how powerful his brother had become now.

Just minutes before, Clyde had been thoroughly defeated by that Assassin within a few seconds, and the Assassin didn't even seem to have exerted much effort either. He was after all a henchman of the Norigan Familia who possessed the Blue Thorn Aura, yet Link managed to defeat him without touching him at all – not to mention the fact that he hadn't even stood up from his chair!

What kind of power was this? How did Link get so mighty in such a short period? These questions kept running through Clyde's mind and he really couldn't come up with any explanations for them.

Not only was he shocked and awed by the human Magician's power, he was also quaking in his boots. The Vulcan's Hand had now completely broken Parson's fighting spirit. It was a spell of at least Level-5, and yet the human Magician had cast it instantaneously! It was simply beyond Parson's imagination, and he'd never faced such a menacing assault before!

How could he possibly defeat an opponent of this level?

"Retreat!" shouted Parson to the Assassin Hedel. He then waited for no one and bolted straight out of the great hall of the castle. He wasn't afraid of death, but he must remain alive, so he could bring the news of what just happened back to the Black Forest.

Although Hedel was completely blinded and his body was bruised all over, he knew

that Norisa had been killed by the sound he heard. He was aware that Parson was making a run for it, so he instinctively wanted to flee himself. He staggered and stumbled and tried to run out of the hall. But he only managed a few steps before he fell down and face-planted on the floor.

He tried to get back on his feet but before he could even try, another Whistle exploded right next to his thigh, breaking the bones immediately. An excruciating pain spread through his body. All Hedel could do now was hug his thigh and screech in pain. He was no longer the master of darkness that he used to be.

Meanwhile, Parson had reached outside the hall. He was now out of Link's line of sight, although his confidence was now completely shattered and all he could think of was to escape as far away from the human Magician as he possibly could.

He went to the furthest corner and began casting a flying spell – the Level-3 Ashen Hawk. He would not stay here and suffer the same fate as Norisa or Hedel, instead he would escape the terrifying human Magician by flying into the sky!

Two seconds later, the spell was finally completed. A gray billowing cloud of smoke then formed into a giant bird. Parson quickly climbed up and the bird swiftly took off into the sky. Parson finally breathed a sigh of relief as he thought that he was out of the human Magician's range now, but this relief hadn't lasted for more than a second when he saw that the Magician had walked out of the great hall.

The Ashen Hawk had flown no more than thirty feet then.

"Where do you think you're going?" shouted Link.

He pointed his wand at the sky, after which the Vulcan's Hand immediately followed in its direction. In no time at all the giant fiery hand grabbed the Ashen Hawk into its palm and pulled the bird along with the Magician down to the ground.

Did you think that I'd just let you fly away from my grasp, Parson? Not a chance!

Chapter 154

Powerful and Wealthy

The harrowing battle lasted merely four seconds and ended with Link's complete triumph.

The Dark Elf Magician was not dead or even injured. The Flaming Hand spell was carefully controlled such that it only destroyed his spell, but dealt no harm to his body.

However, Parsons had lost all energy to resist. He cowered within the giant palm of flames, revealing only his head. He closed his eyes awaiting his final judgement.

On the ground, Assassin Hedel held his broken leg in pain. His voice had become hoarse from his screaming. He had also become extremely weak due to the loss of blood. He whimpered helplessly while he lay on the bed of cold snow.

Link thought for a moment and came up with a solution to deal with the two Dark Elves.

They must die. However, it was not time yet. He needed to get some information out of them before he would end their lives.

He snapped his fingers lightly and released a Glass Orb spell towards Hedel. The glass orb positioned itself right beside Hedel's ears before exploding. The shockwaves from the explosion entered Hedel's brain without any obstruction, causing him to faint almost immediately.

Link then ordered a servant, "Remove all his clothes and equipment. Shave his hair and bandage his wounds. Don't let him die just yet."

Link did not shave his head merely to insult him. It was due to the Assassin's common habit of storing their triumph card in the most unexpected areas, including their hair. This was what made Assassins dangerous even if they were nursing a broken leg.

The servants all looked at each other in fear. They were merely ordinary people who had not seen a Dark Elf in their lives. Furthermore, they just witnessed this Assassin

take the life of countless soldiers and servants in the castle. None of them had the courage to approach the injured Assassin.

"I'll do it!" Clyde spoke. He was a Warrior and knew exactly what Link was thinking.

He stepped forward and removed Hedel's body armor. He then picked up Hedel's dagger from the ground and skillfully shaved his head with a few clean strokes. After making sure that there were no hidden weapons, he then began to bandage his wounds.

A Level-5 Assassin who was well versed in Battle Aura possessed a strong vitality. After the initial treatment of his wounds, his breathing stabilized and he was out of danger.

Clyde then used a rope to bound Hedel tightly, making sure that he could not even budge before looking at Link. He asked, "Brother, what should we do next?"

His brother had shown outstanding battle prowess. If a family simply wanted to survive, unity was all they needed, However, if they wanted to make their name known throughout the continent, a powerful individual would be required.

Link was such a person!

In the military, the strong were naturally given respect and power. Since Link had shown his overwhelming strength, Clyde's attitude was completely different from before and he was not uncomfortable in showing it.

Link was no longer a "defiant kid just after learning a few magic spells". In his heart, Link was now a genius, a calm and terrifying Magician that could bring prosperity to the Morani Family.

He would definitely follow him to the ends of the earth.

Link thought for a moment and threw a low-level recovery potion to Clyde. "There are still many tiny metal fragments in the Assassin's body. Even though his condition has stabilized, it is only a temporary measure. Feed him the potion."

Link had considered the benefits before taking this action. By leaving the Dark Elves alive, he would be able to obtain valuable information about the Pralync Kingdom. By keeping both of them alive, he could even validate their statements through

comparison.

"No problem." Clyde obediently opened Hedel's mouth and fed him the recovery potion.

Link then turned his attention to the Magician now that Hedel's issue was settled.

The Magician had completely given up. He simply stayed helplessly in the Flaming Hand and had a pained and fearful expression on his face.

Link immediately cast a Mana Lock spell on him.

This was a spell he learned from Herrera. It needed the complete cooperation of the target for it to be successful. It was an extremely strong spell and it was impossible to rely on one's own willpower to break free of the restrictions. This was at least true for the Magicians he had seen up till now.

Link was not completely sure that the spell would succeed. He took a chance seeing that Parsons was currently dejected and filled with disbelief and fear. When Parsons realized that something was amiss, the shackles were already locked in place.

A Magician who lost his magic powers was nothing more than an ordinary human.

Link then released his Flaming Hand and Parsons fell onto the ground with a blank expression on his face. Link knew that he would offer no more resistance.

Link then stepped forward and released The Magician's Hand, using it to remove the magic equipment from Parsons body piece by piece, starting from the staff to the defensive magic ring, the dimensional bracelet and the crystal headwear, leaving nothing behind.

When this was done, Parsons presented no threat even to the most defenseless of humans.

"Second brother, bring the two prisoners to the dungeon and lock them up. Remember to lock them up separately, do not allow them to interact with one another," Link ordered.

"No problem." Clyde obeyed and carried each prisoner in one hand before swiftly transporting them to the underground dungeon.

Only Wharton, Lilith, Molly, Trevor and a few trembling servants were left in the courtyard.

Wharton stared at Link with complicated feelings. He kept silent the whole time.

Link ignored him and turned his attention to the servant, "What are all of you doing! Bring the injured master to his room. Also, Trevor, summon the priest from the county.

"Yes."

"Yes, third young master."

"Will do."

After a flurry of obedient replies, the servants hastily went to do what they were told, as though they were instantly unlocked from their previous shackles.

As for Wharton, his mouth opened a few times, clearly feeling the need to speak to Link. However, despite the many attempts, he was unable to let out an audible sound. He did not manage to say what he wanted to in the end.

Link's transformation was too drastic. He was no longer the little brother he could bully, but an unfathomable powerful Magician. Thinking on his previous attempt to suppress him, Wharton couldn't help but feel ridiculous. He must have looked like a clown.

At the same time, he was overcome with embarrassment and rage. He did not know how to face Link.

After he was brought back to his room, only Lilith and Molly were left.

Their feelings were much simpler and direct. After the initial shock, only joy and relief remained in their hearts. In Lilith's eyes, no matter how powerful Link became, he was still her son.

She witnessed the entire battle and saw a confident and powerful Link dominating the battlefield. It reminded her slightly of the old Duke when he was younger. No, in fact, her son exceeded the old Duke in every way.

She was incredibly proud.

Lilith smiled as Link walked towards her. Tears of joy flowed down from her eyes. Her son had finally become strong enough to protect her after all these years. She no longer had to suffer in this cold and cruel household.

Molly felt both joy and respect at the same time. She lowered her head and averted Link's gaze the entire time. She felt that the gaze was incredibly oppressive. When Link stared at her, she instinctively bowed before realizing that Link was simply her younger brother.

"Brother..." She could not continue her sentence.

Link concealed his magic presence seeing the slight expression of fear on their faces. His expression was then restored back to the gentle and inviting smile he had previously.

He spoke softly, "The castle is slightly messy, I will have to let the servants clean it up. Mother, sister, please go rest in your rooms."

"Oh, alright." The two women then headed back to their rooms.

There were only a few servants left and around twenty soldiers who were lucky enough to survive the massacre. At this moment, Clyde had also returned.

Link then said, "Clyde, the castle needs to restore its daily operations as soon as possible. The losses have to be calculated as well."

Clyde patted his chest and said, "I will take care of it!"

He then took the remaining soldiers away while Link followed closely behind.

The three Dark Elves were indeed powerful. They merely took a total of five minutes from their initial attack to when they reached the dining hall.

In this time, they killed a total of 180 people, less than 10 of whom were servants while the rest were soldiers. There was even a Level-3 Family Knight among the casualties.

This efficiency was astonishing.

When the bodies were finally accounted for, the plaza was almost filled with dead bodies. There were close to no injured personnel, all of them were killed in a single

blow.

The mood was heavy.

Link also felt apologetic at the sight of this scene. He was the reason the three Dark Elves made their way to the Morani castle. He had indirectly taken the lives of these soldiers. He sighed before speaking, "They were all loyal Warriors. Their souls have reached the heavens. In order to ease their worrying hearts, I have decided to compensate their families for their deaths."

The soldiers who were lucky to be alive listened intently. Clyde, on the other hand, had a worried look on his face. This was a huge number of casualties. If they compensated the families at the standard rate of eight gold coins per soldier, that would add up to 1400 gold coins. Their family did not have this amount of wealth.

He wanted to remind Link about their economic predicament but was unable to in front of the surviving soldiers. He could only stare at Link anxiously.

Link saw Clyde's uncomfortable movements but ignored them completely. He faced the soldiers and continued, "Every dead soldier will receive 20 gold coins in compensation while every servant will receive 15 gold coins. For all those surviving servants and soldiers, you will be rewarded with ten gold coins each."

This caused a commotion within the 20 surviving soldiers, clearly excited over the news. However, some of the veteran soldiers had a look of suspicion on their faces. They clearly did not believe that the Morani Family would have this much money.

Clyde could no longer contain himself. After all, it was better to stop this atrocity now than to lose their reputation because they could not come up with enough money for the compensation. He pulled Link over and whispered, "Third brother, our family does not have this much money... this is..."

Before he could continue, Link used action to contradict his words.

A crisp sound of metal colliding against one another echoed through the plaza. Under the illumination of the surrounding light from the torches, a blanket of shimmering circular objects covered the snow ground.

They were gold coins, a huge amount of them!

Link had asked for 6000 gold coins in advance from Herrera previously. However, before he could spend this money, an accident happened. He thus had over 5000 gold coins left in his dimensional pendant. This was merely 4000 gold coins, not even his entire fortune.

Link then rebutted, "Brother, I guess this would be enough?"

Of course!

In fact, everyone in the plaza was staring at the golden phenomenon on the snow-covered ground. Two of the Warriors who were not completely dead suddenly seemed to be filled with energy, coughing and desperately signaling to their surviving comrades that they were still alive. Link cast an Elemental Healing spell on each of the soldiers who escaped from the clutches of death at the sight of this golden wonder.

All the suspicion in their hearts dissipated completely at the sight of these gold coins.

"Brother, use these to settle the compensation issues. As for the rest of the money, use them to repair the castle.

"Yes, no problem!" Clyde no longer knew what to say. He had this sudden realization that all his worries were nothing in front of his younger brother.

To the surviving soldiers, they would be loyal to anyone who gave them enough compensation. Furthermore, it would be for the best if their master was both generous and powerful at the same time. They could not let this great opportunity slip past them.

A Warrior started chanting the first name of the Morani family. Soon, the entire plaza was chanting in excitement, "Morani! Morani! Morani!"

Clyde looked at the excited faces around him and his heart burned with a newfound passion.

When he returned to the Silver Fortress, he would confidently announce, "I am from the Morani Family, the brother of Link, the great Magician!"

Chapter 155

Torture? There's No Need for That

Link's actions had given Clyde great confidence. Although Clyde's career in the army hadn't been quite so successful, he was still a proud and upright man and a member of the Morani noble family.

The first thing Clyde did with the 4000 gold coins from Link was to give each of the soldiers 10 gold coins. None of the soldiers had ever touched such a large amount of money. They were both happy and anxious because they were worried that they might misplace the gold coins. In the end, some of them even resorted to hiding the gold coins in the crotch of their pants to make sure that no one would ever steal them!

Now with all the soldiers satisfied, Clyde could then lead and control them with ease. They didn't take long at all before order was completely restored in the castle. The traces of blood had all been washed away, and to prevent the spreading of plagues, the names of the fallen soldiers were recorded and then their bodies were cremated.

By midnight, even the damaged drawbridge was fully repaired. The gates of the castle were then closed. Had it not been for the fact that there were significantly fewer people in the castle now, no one would've noticed any signs that they had been attacked and that fierce battles had occurred there just hours ago.

But these were trivial matters, and naturally Link took no part in any of it. When everyone else was busy restoring order to the castle outside, Link was in the castle's dungeon, and facing him right now was the Dark Elf Magician.

Link wanted the two Dark Elves to speak. In this situation, the most commonly used method was torture – but Link had no interest in using such a barbaric and not to mention bothersome method. No, there was no need for that. There was a much easier way, albeit a more cunning way, to make the Dark Elves spill out everything they knew.

The Magician had just been completely defeated, so he was now at his most vulnerable state when his mental strength and will were at their weakest. It wouldn't stay that way for long, however, as Magicians' minds were notoriously robust. Link knew that if the Magician was to be left alone through the night, his will and determination

would've recovered by tomorrow morning. That was why he must interrogate him now.

In the dark, damp dungeon, Link sat on a chair while the Magician Parson sat against the wall ten feet away.

Link said nothing at first, he only stared into Parson's eyes – those deep red eyes of a Dark Elf which had gone dull because of confinement. After more than ten seconds Parson finally couldn't stand Link's stare any longer, so he looked away.

"Is the Death Hand preparing to attack the East Cove Magic Academy?" asked Link suddenly. He used a very gentle tone and showed no trace of hostility, and it sounded just as if he was chatting with a friend. Link had even used the Elvish language to speak with the Dark Elf Magician with an accent that sounded quite authentic as well.

"It's... uh... it's nonsense!" Parson responded. He stopped himself and denied Link's claims just in time, but then it was too late as his initial reaction had proven that what Link had suspected was true.

Link had now gotten what he wanted.

"Don't think that I know nothing about your plot to attack the East Cove Magic Academy," he said with a cold smile on his face. "You've even got a plan called Black Moon Conspiracy, and Felidia was involved in it, isn't that correct?"

"You're wrong! There's no such thing!" Parson was in doubt now. His eyes darted around the cell uncertainly even while his lips were vehemently denying Link's words.

In truth, Parson was only a retainer of the Norigan Familia, so he hadn't much information about the Death Hand or their activities. At this point, though, much of the Pralync Kingdom's secret information had been leaked to him indirectly. He didn't pay that close an attention to all of them, but he'd gleaned more than enough from casual conversations with his comrades.

That was how he knew that the Death Hand was focusing their efforts on the East Cove Magic Academy, because that is where more than 70% of Norton Kingdom's best Magicians came from. Once they destroyed the academy and eliminated their Magicians, the army of the Norton Kingdom would be considerably weakened by at least four times by the absence of the Magicians' aid!

And this operation, called the Black Moon Conspiracy, had involved the Magician Felidia. According to rumors, the operation had been going on for quite a while and everything had gone smoothly, with only one last step left.

But how did this human Magician find out about this secret operation? He couldn't come up with any ideas for the moment, in fact he was suspecting that there might be a mole or a spy within the highest officials of the kingdom's government.

"You've come so far to avenge Alina's death," continued Link, "so I'm guessing you must've heard of the mysterious master Magician friend of mine, isn't that right?"

"Of course I have," answered Parson. He felt there was no longer any need to keep any secrets from the human Magician, as he might just kill him and have that mysterious Magician friend of his to obtain his memory from his soul anyway.

"Yes, she had the ability to use the Soul Searching spell," said Link with a cunning smile, as if he could hear Parson's thoughts. "It is such an evil spell, don't you think? I don't really like those kinds of dark magic spells, but she still is a friend of mine, after all. If I asked her to come and help me with the promise of some rewards, I'm sure she would gladly comply."

"..."

Parson began to panic. He had just witnessed Link's awesome power in the battle against him, so his mental strength was still fragile. Link only had to play a little trick on him and he would bend to Link's will.

Parson kept gulping and said nothing for more than ten seconds.

"Promise me," he said finally, "that after telling you what you want to know you'll give me a quick and painless death."

"No problem at all," said Link. "How about a cup of Green Hylia Wine?"

"It's a deal, then," said Parson with a nod. "I must tell you, though, that I'm just the Norigan Familia's retainer, not a member of the Death Hand. I may know some things they were up to, but don't expect any details from me."

"Is the Assassin the family's retainer as well?" Link asked.

"Yes, he is," answered Parson, not bothering to keep any more secrets. "The Warrior was one too."

"Understood," said Link as he patiently listened to Parson. "You may continue."

Parson let out a long sigh before he continued to speak.

"There was indeed a plan called the Black Moon Conspiracy," he finally said. "Its target was the East Cove Magic Academy, although I have no idea how they were going to implement the plan. All I know is that once the plan was successful the academy would be reduced to ashes."

"Anything else?" asked Link, just as calm as he had ever been. No one could ever guess what was in his mind at that moment.

"Yes, you!" said Parson. "The Death Hand had put a high price on your head. They've announced it to the public that whoever could bring your head to them they would be rewarded with ten thousand gold coins! Not only that, but the Magicians of the Silver Moon Council and Prince Norigan had also contributed to the rewards as well. Now anyone who could bring your head back to Pralync would receive a tailor-made magic gear of epic quality along with the title of a hereditary duke that came with fifty acres of fertile land!"

"Who would've thought that this ugly head of mine would be worth so much?" Link said while rubbing his neck.

"Ha! You won't walk this earth for much longer than I will," sneered Parson. "Soon enough I will see you in hell. And don't ever expect yourself to enter the gates of heaven after you're dead, because the moment they cut off your head the servants of the Lady of Darkness will drag you straight down to hell!"

Link remained unmoved by these words. He was aware that powerful men had enemies, and as the saying went, only those who hadn't stood up for anything made no enemies. Now that he had attracted such hatred from the Dark Elves, it must mean that they had finally acknowledged his power.

He should be proud of that, not afraid.

"Is there anything else?" Link asked again.

"No!" replied Parson, who then turned silent and would say nothing more.

Neither did Link have any more questions to ask Parson. He got all the information he needed for now. As for the Black Moon Conspiracy, he guessed it might have more or less the same objectives as the incident in the game. When it all came down to it, the only person who had the ability to reduce the East Cove Magic Academy was the demon who was captured and chained by Bryant – Tarviss.

The only question he had now was how the Dark Elves were going to release Tarviss without the Occultic Runes. Then, just as he was considering the matter, a notification popped up.

Mission Activated: Investigation

Mission Details: Find out the details of the Black Moon Conspiracy.

Mission Rewards: 80 Omni Points.

Naturally, Link accepted the mission. Parson was now no longer of any use to him. He then used the Magician's Hand to float a cup of Green Hylia Wine towards Parson's direction.

Parson took the cup of wine into his hands without any hesitation. He then defiantly stared at Link so intently that it seemed he wanted to engrave the image of the Magician who had defeated him onto his soul before he died. Then, Parson swallowed the wine in one gulp. Seconds later, a peculiar smile emerged on his lips, then his body was bent over and he fell down to the ground with a heavy thud.

Parson was dead.

Link ordered the prison guard to clear away the dead body. He then headed towards Hedel's cell.

Hedel was now awake, but his wounds were too grave that he was writhing on the floor. Link swept his gaze all around the cell after stepping into the cell, wearing a merciless smile on his face while he was at it, although his body remained motionless.

"I've just killed Parson," said Link.

"I didn't expect you to keep him as a pet," replied Hedel sneeringly.

"He told me many things before he died," Link continued, ignoring Hedel's jeers. "I find what he told me about the Black Moon Conspiracy especially interesting. He said that you were preparing to release the demon Tarviss so he would destroy the East Cove Magic Academy."

Link's ruse had once again brought results as Hedel's eyes were widened suddenly and he stared blankly at Link with a puzzled look.

"But Parson wasn't a member of the Death Hand," Hedel said in a surprised tone. "How would he know anything about the Black Moon Conspiracy?"

As a notoriously powerful Assassin, Hedel must've been involved with the Death Hand before. Plus, he was a high-profile professional Assassin, so he would have slightly more access to secret information within the organization compared to Parson. He wasn't a part of the members who would implement the plan himself, so he didn't have the deepest knowledge of the details of the Black Moon Conspiracy. He knew, of course, that the demon Tarviss would be released, but as for the method of the release, Hedel had absolutely no clue.

The response Link got from the Assassin confirmed Link's speculation of the connection between the Black Moon Conspiracy and Tarviss. He decided to play one last trick on Hedel.

"I was just kidding," Link said. "Parson isn't dead. He'd actually just sworn his loyalty to me!" He then broke out into a mischievous laughter.

"That's impossible!" shouted Hedel. "You're speaking nonsense! You're just lying to me, aren't you?" Yet somehow Hedel believed that Link truly knew what he was talking about. But the Black Moon Conspiracy was a top-secret operation, how could this human Magician ever find out about it?

Link burst out in laughter again. It was just as he expected. This Assassin was just another Norigan Familia retainer, so he wouldn't know much more than Parson did. Link was satisfied with the information about Tarviss that he managed to wrinkle out, and he knew that there wouldn't be much more to tease out from Hedel. Thus there was no point in keeping Hedel alive now, so he promptly unleashed a Whistle and blew the Assassin's head clean off his neck.

It appeared that the Black Moon Conspiracy was now the most urgent matter that

must be dealt with immediately. Although there was still some time before the set date of April 15, no one could predict what might happen before the time came, not to mention how clueless they were of the methods the Dark Elves would employ to release Tarviss. Link realized that he must inform Herrera of this matter as soon as possible.

After careful consideration, Link decided that he must rush back to the East Cove Magic Academy first thing the next day.

Chapter 156

Link's Worldview

Link was planning to leave the next morning. However, an unexpected incident interrupted his plan.

The old Viscount breathed his last at 4 o'clock in the morning. After all, this physical body was still a true Morani. He could not simply leave when such an incident happened.

As it was not safe to send messages through the mail, he would have to notify the academy of the Black Moon Conspiracy at a later date. Fortunately, this plan would only be put into action on April 15th. There should still be enough time after he was done with the funeral.

At six in the morning, the mourning bells of Puffer County rang. The low and deep rumble of the bells echoed throughout the entire county. This sound proclaimed the death of the old Duke and at the same time, signified the automatic succession of a new Duke.

The same thing had happened in Puffer County for many years. However, this one was special. Other than the low rumbling of the bells, another news made its way into the county, one which involved the Duke's youngest son, Link.

No one in Puffer County was actually concerned about the death of the old Duke. Death was but a natural process especially when one got old. Furthermore, the county had already seen the death of many Dukes, everyone was already numb to such events. On the other hand, everyone was talking about the ambush on the Morani castle last night.

It was the topic of everyone's conversation.

"Did you hear? The Morani family was assaulted by enemies. In order to exact revenge, the enemy charged right into their castle and killed many people!" The person speaking had a look of excitement. After all, there was no one in his family who was affected by the massacre. It was thus simply an interesting story for him.

Someone next to him then joined in the conversation, "Of course! The youngest son of the Gillum Family was killed, but their family is now rich!"

"Rich? What do you mean? Can dead people become wealthy as well?" Another person asked curiously.

"Don't you know? The young Duke compensated the family of every deceased soldier 20 gold coins. For example, the Yaeger Family had four sons, two of which were guards at the Morani castle. After they died in the massacre yesterday, the Yaeger Family received 40 gold coins! I heard that young master Link was the one who provided the gold coins."

"Link? The youngest son of the Duke that doesn't even dare to whisper on the streets?" This news was appalling.

"Yes, it's him! He is now an extremely powerful Magician and has boundless wealth!"

It was all over the streets. No matter how the conversation strayed, it would eventually converge on how wealthy Link was.

There was no helping it. Puffer County was extremely poor. If even the Duke was poor, the people of the county would definitely suffer in poverty.

Many people in Puffer County had never seen gold coins in their lives. The news of a family getting a full 40 gold coins in compensation got everyone excited. Many even wished that one of their family members died in the massacre.

Human life was worth nothing when compared to wealth.

The news became more and more outrageous as it spread throughout the entire county. There were even multiple versions of the story as it got passed through word of mouth. One of them even mentioned, "Magician Link can move the mountains and oceans with his power. He can even turn stone into gold, thus allowing him to have boundless wealth."

As for the death of the Duke, no one even bothered.

Link, who was originally unknown and weak, became famous overnight in Puffer County. In the castle, Link and his two brothers were busy planning the Duke's funeral.

Link's job was to provide the funds required for the funeral. After taking out 4000 gold coins previously, he still had around 1300 gold coins left. At the same time, Magician Parsons had 1600 gold coins stored in his dimensional bracelet. He then took 500 gold coins from his pool of gold coins to fund the funeral.

Link had resolved the Morani family's biggest issue, which was the lack of money. He then left the superfluous preparations to Wharton and Clyde. His mother and sister also offered to help out in the process. Link was thus relieved of all his duties.

The World of Firuman was in chaos and human life was not worth more than a blade of grass. Even the funeral held for a noble was also very simple. The entire funeral would only take one and a half days to complete, including the one day where the people of Puffer County would pay their respects to the old Duke for his service.

As Link had nothing to do in this period, he stayed in the study room the old Duke used to reside in to continue his magic research.

He mainly studied the Scroll of Enlightenment that he had gotten not long ago. When he felt inspired, he would then take out his thesis to work on it. When he felt tired, he would continue his sketch of the magic bracelet.

The black-dressed woman...no, it's Eleanor. Eleanor was of great help at Jade Street, he would have to repay the debt by making a beautiful and powerful bracelet for her. At the very least, the quality needed to be better than the Phoenix Bracelet that he had crafted previously.

If he got tired of all these three things, he would take out the white stone Prince Phillip had given him and observe the intricate patterns with interest and awe.

Even though Link did not know how to use the stone, the stone had a smooth and shiny exterior and was definitely an object of beauty. Link simply treated it like a toy.

The day quickly ended while he was busy doing these four things. In the evening, the servant came with a message that dinner was ready.

The people at the dining table were exactly the same as the previous day. Although Wharton was heavily injured, he was still a Level-4 Warrior and possessed strong vitality. Coupled with the healing powers of the priest, he could already move freely without any external aid.

Upon seeing Link, Wharton kept his arrogance in check and greeted him with a smile. His knees were also trembling, probably from last night's injury, or perhaps something else?

Lilith and Molly had nothing to fear when they saw Wharton in this state. They were extremely relaxed during dinner, no longer carrying the look of fear and apprehension like last night.

Clyde took out 300 gold coins and pushed them towards Link, "These are the remaining gold coins. The compensation and repair works cost a total of 3700 gold coins."

The 300 gold coins filled the money sack to the brim. Wharton stared jealously at the golden treasures while eating his favorite roasted geese. He was however, not focusing on the delicious flavor of his favorite food, but instead, thinking about keeping the gold coins for himself.

However, he was afraid to even move an inch as Link was present.

Link did not keep the money sack. He snapped his fingers and cast the Magician's Hand, adding 200 more gold coins into the sack, making the total 500 gold coins. He then pushed the money sack back towards Clyde and said, "Brother, you should keep this money. You will need this when you go back to the Silver Fortress."

Clyde was a person of good character and was competent. He was also a blood relative and was definitely trustworthy. Even though he did not accomplish much in the Silver Fortress these few years, it was probably due to his lack of wealth which restricted his actions.

Link had no reason not to support him.

The God of Light wanted him to save the world. These outrageous missions would ignite the burning passion of any online gamers. However, Link was now a calm Magician and could rationalize the situation clearly. In order to save the world, he had to be down-to-earth and let his actions speak for themselves.

One of the methods to do that was to improve his reputation, creating connections with everyone that he could, creating a strong alliance. This was his worldview ever since he stepped into the World of Firuman.

In fact, this was also the reason he chose to accept the Ferde Wilderness as his territory. If he could successfully turn the wasteland into a prosperous city, his reputation would increase exponentially. At the same time, talented individuals would also join his territory as word got out, allowing him to create an even stronger alliance.

Back to the main point.

Upon hearing Link's offer, Clyde was elated and took the money sack back without hesitation, "Third brother is really generous! I will politely accept it then."

It was true that he was running out of money. He had less than 10 gold coins left in his pocket. When he was out hunting or drinking with his friends in the Silver Fortress, he had to constantly watch his spending. These 500 gold coins were just what he needed.

This made Wharton extremely envious. He could no longer contain himself and asked, "Brother, I heard that you can turn stones into gold?"

"No." Link knew exactly what Wharton was planning. He simply shook his head and replied curtly.

While Wharton was also his blood brother, his character was nowhere near Clyde's. Wharton was extremely selfish and manipulative. Link could not hurt him as he was still a family member, but he could choose to stay as far away from him as possible.

His attitude came as a shock to Wharton.

Link ignored him and continued, "It is father's funeral tomorrow. After the funeral, I will return to the academy immediately. Mother and sister, you two will accompany me."

The two women were relieved and extremely happy to finally be released from Wharton's demonic clutches. They immediately nodded in agreement.

Wharton did not expect Link to be leaving so soon. He still hadn't received any benefits or money from his wealthy brother! He immediately said, "The Winter Festival is coming, why not leave after that?"

"No." Link once again gave a short and curt reply. The rage inside Wharton was building up.

Link turned to Clyde and said, "Brother, my land is just at the Ferde Wilderness. It is not too far from here. You are always welcomed to visit."

"The Ferde Wilderness? No problem at all, I will visit whenever I'm free. Please entertain me when the time comes," Clyde laughed. Even though the Ferde Wilderness was pretty barren, Link was a comfortable person to speak with. Going to the Ferde Wilderness was definitely a better choice than to stay in this oppressive castle and face Wharton's mood swings.

Wharton could not contain his rage anymore and sneered, "That is just a piece of barren land. I had higher expectations."

Link looked at Wharton and spoke in a serious tone, "It is a barren land now, but in three years, everything will change."

The mining of the anti-magic soil, changing the climate using magic and developing sea trade routes were just some of the plans he had for his land. In a few years, he would definitely see that the Ferde Wilderness become a land of miracles.

Link's declaration seemed extremely impossible and arrogant. If this happened yesterday, Wharton would have ridiculed him and dismissed his ideas as preposterous. However, he was at a loss for words now. His third brother had abilities completely beyond his imagination. He had no idea what kind of miracles he could achieve next.

Even Clyde was worried at Link's confidence, "Third brother, I have complete faith in your abilities. However, building an entire settlement from scratch requires a huge amount of gold coins. Is that even possible?"

Link nodded, "It will be."

He already had everything planned. He would first make sure the Ferde Wilderness could stand on its own by constructing basic infrastructure. These were all essential investments and would take up to around 40000 gold coins. He would then start to mine the anti-magic soil and exploit their market value to boost the economy. When the economy of his territory began to take off, he could then fully focus on expanding it to a larger scale.

Therefore, first step, 40000 gold coins.

Time to earn some money when I get back to the academy, Link thought.

Chapter 157

His Fame Will Spread Throughout the Firuman Continent

Overall, the atmosphere during dinner in the Morani Castle on the second day of Link's return was quite pleasant.

After the meal, Link went back to studying the Scroll of Enlightenment in the privacy of his room and even managed to use the materials he had brought with him from the academy to create a rechargeable defensive spell magic ring. This ring would allow the insertion of the same spell into the ring even after it had been used.

And so, the night passed with Link spending his time in solitude and hard at work.

By nine in the morning the next day, the funeral for the old Viscount went on as planned. His body was then put to rest under the ground around noon while the priest chanted holy readings. And thus, the whole matter was settled.

Soon, the carriage from the East Cove Magic Academy was ready as well. Luckily the coachman was a perceptive man who went into hiding the moment he felt there was something awry last night, and so he survived the Dark Elves' attack unscathed.

Before they set out, Lilith and Molly went to their rooms to pack up their things while Wharton and Clyde stood in the courtyard to bid farewell to their brother. As they were waiting for Link's mother and sister, Link handed the ring he created last night to Clyde as a parting gift.

"I've just made this defensive magic ring for you," Link told his brother. "Wear it on your left forefinger. When you want to use the spell, just firmly press the surface of the ring with your thumb and you'll be good to go."

The ring was made with Mithril and it looked outwardly plain even though its inner workings were complex and intricate. Link had produced it with the utmost care to ensure that it was of the highest quality that he could manage, though he didn't want to make it look too expensive to avoid attracting petty jealousies from the other

knights which might cause his brother trouble.

Clyde beamed at the mention of a magic gear. He put on the ring and thought it felt just right – it was neither too tight nor too loose, while the ring itself was not too big and fancy that it might lure any unwanted looks.

"Try the spell," said Link.

Clyde then went on to press his thumb on the surface of the ring and immediately a shroud of faint aura enveloped his body. It was the defensive spell that Link had added his own Supreme Magical Skill modifications – the Edelweiss.

Level-4 Edelweiss was a bit too complicated to be fixed into the ring, so Link was forced to use the Level-3 version of the spell. Once he was sure that Clyde knew how to release the spell properly, Link then waved his wand over the ring and recharged the ring with his Mana, while at the same time explaining the spell to his brother.

"This is a defensive magic ring," he told Clyde, "and it will protect you from any attack that is Level-3 and below, whether it's a magic spell or the blade of a sword. It can also decrease the power of Level-4 attacks to some degree. You can use the spell five times. After that, just find a Magician who accompanied the army and tell them to direct their Mana into it and it'll be just as good as new."

Clyde knew instantly from Link's explanation that this ring could mean the difference between life and death for him in a battlefield. He was sure that the ring must be worth more than a thousand gold coins. Clyde was immensely grateful to his little brother, yet he just couldn't find the right words to say. In the end he just stayed silent and vowed to himself that he must now work hard and become an outstanding knight in the army so he wouldn't let his brother down!

Meanwhile, Wharton was watching his two brothers on the side. His eyes were green with envy for the ring on Clyde's finger, but he knew that he mustn't expect Link to show the same courtesy to him as he had treated him poorly in the past.

To his surprise though, Link suddenly walked up to him and handed him another Mithril ring that looked identical to Clyde's.

"Regardless of what had happened in the past, you are still our eldest brother," said Link. "This ring is just like the one I gave Clyde. Use your thumb to activate it. You can use it five times as well. I won't bother to explain the rest." Link had no intention of

pleasing Wharton with the gift, he merely wanted to make sure that Wharton would have no cause of jealousy or displeasure, which might in the end bring trouble to Link in the future.

Wharton stood there motionless and unsure of how to respond. He wanted the ring more than anything else, yet he feared that Link might be playing some kind of a magic trick on him, so he hesitated to reach out his hand and take the ring.

"What are you waiting for? Just take it!" said Clyde, annoyed at Wharton's distrust of his own flesh and blood.

Wharton finally came to his senses. He reached for the ring and clutched it in his hand tightly, afraid that Link might try to take it back.

Link had no time to entertain Wharton's behavior so he turned his back from his brother the second he took the ring and walked away without saying another word.

Wharton noticed Link's cold manners and suddenly felt embarrassed of his own narrow-mindedness.

"Have I really been that cruel to you in the past?" Wharton suddenly asked.

Just then, snowflakes started to fall from the sky. The biting cold, winter breeze whistled across the courtyard and the cold pierced through the skin like little blades of knives. Lilith and Molly were both ready now and had reached the entrance of the castle's great hall with their luggage. As they came out, a gust of wind blew against them, causing both of them to shiver like leaves.

Link looked over and noticed that while the clothes his mother and Molly were wearing looked quite thick, they were made of cotton from the South which couldn't protect them from the cold in the least.

Such clothes couldn't be worth much more than five or six silver coins. Even merchant families with a little more affluence in the River Cove Town wore better clothes than that. Come to think of it, even the coachman's livery was made of much better materials than his mother and sister's clothes, yet they were the Viscount's wife and daughter!

Obviously, this was another one of Wharton's doing.

Link turned to Wharton with a frown. He really couldn't be bothered to say anything more to him now. Forget it, he thought. Mother and Molly won't be coming back to this oppressive castle again anyway. Once we reach River Cove Town, I'll just buy them the nicest and thickest clothes I can find. It won't cost me more than 100 gold coins.

Wharton felt Link's sharp gaze and moved his lips as if to say something, yet the normally loquacious Wharton suddenly found himself tongue-tied and unable to find the right words to say. For the first time in his life, he felt so ashamed of himself that he wished he could burrow a hole in the ground and hide in it.

"Mother, Molly, let's get in the carriage," said Link. The East Cove Magic Academy's carriage was equipped with a warming magic seal where it was comfortably warm as spring in there all year round.

The two ladies were still quivering from the cold as they rushed towards the carriage. The both gasped the moment they entered it and were immediately enchanted by the wonders of magic.

Link then waved goodbye at Clyde and followed his mother and sister into the carriage as well.

Once they were all settled inside, the coachman cracked his whip and the carriage slowly drove out of the Morani castle.

Clyde stood there in the castle courtyard watching the exquisite blue carriage slowly disappear out of sight. He then let out a long sigh and turned to his elder brother beside him.

"I don't know if you've noticed it, Wharton," said Clyde, "but it's obvious that sooner or later Link's reputation and fame will spread across Firuman. The good name of our family will rise to glorious heights because of him. If all you wanted to do with your life is to stay cooped up in this measly castle, then just ignore what I'm going to say. But if you want to rise to a higher station in life and see more of the world, then it's time to think of a way to patch things up with Link, dear brother!"

Clyde had seen in the past two days how exceptionally powerful his little brother really was. He'd seen so many young men touted as the next big thing or the young genius in the army, yet none of their skills could compare to his own little brother!

Once he'd said all he had to say to Wharton, Clyde walked quietly back to the great hall

of the castle.

Meanwhile, his brother Wharton stood there with his mouth agape, unable to make any response. He rubbed his head gently while his other hand was holding the magic ring from Link. It was clearly a ring with a smooth surface, yet somehow, he could've sworn that it felt prickly in the palm of his hand, as if he was holding a sharp needle in his hand.

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The carriage moved swiftly and in no time at all, they'd left the Morani castle far behind.

"Mother, Molly," said Link, "the Ferde Wilderness is too desolate to inhabit right now, and I haven't settled into the place yet. But I do have a cabin that acts as the headquarters for my troop of mercenaries in the Girvent Forest near River Cove Town. Would it be alright if both of you stay there while I make my estate more hospitable?"

The late Viscount and his eldest son had ruled over her life like tyrants for the past couple of decades now, and naturally not once did they ever ask for her opinion on any matter. She almost shed tears of happiness when she heard her own son asking for her opinion with such a gentle and respectful tone.

"Of course it is, dear," said Lilith. She had just turned forty years old recently, yet her face was already covered in wrinkles and lines. It was a testament to the hard life that she had to endure ever since she married into the Morani family. But she had been intensely happy ever since Link returned to the castle two days ago. Finally, she could smile earnestly from the bottom of her heart, and it made her face bloom like a flower as she now looked much younger as well.

Link's elder sister Molly nodded her head as well. She would turn 22 this year, yet she had never set foot outside the Morani castle before. Both her father and her eldest brother had treated her as if she was another one of their belongings to be traded as they saw fit and never shown a trace of respect for her as a human being. This kind of life had made her self-esteem very low and she grew up to be a shy and timid young woman.

But Link was radically different. Her little brother had spoken to her in a gentle tone, he was respectful to her. Even when Link was being harsh to her, it was all because he

cared and was worried about her. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that Link had given her a new lease on life.

Molly could never have foreseen how her 22nd year would turn out to be the most blissful year of her life so far.

Lilith had been the fairest maiden in Pufferfish County when she was young. That was the reason why the old Viscount had noticed her and asked for her hand. Unfortunately, Link had inherited none of her good looks, unlike Molly, who looked almost identical to her younger self. Molly had a head full of black curly hair, her eyes were onyx black, her skin was as smooth as butter and her figure was youthful and lithe. The warmth in the carriage and the happiness and relief she felt to have escaped from the clutches of her father and elder brother had now brought back the color to her face and made her look positively angelic.

Link sighed gently as he thought of his mother and sister's fate. They were both normal people with no talents or abilities, and they'd suffered through so much bullying inflicted on them by his late father and Wharton. Link vowed that from now on he would provide them with a safe and happy life where they would be free of any worries.

He then promptly took out two silk pouches and filled them with 50 gold coins each, which he then gave to his mother and Molly.

"Both of you take these gold coins," said Link. "Use it to pay the servants once we reach River Cove Town. Then I'll buy you some new clothes, jewelry and the like later."

Lilith accepted the gold coins without any questions. She knew that Link had given them more than they needed, but she could just save them for Link in case he needed them later.

For Molly, though, it was the first time she'd ever seen that amount of money and she was hesitant to accept it.

"But Link," she said, "this is just too much! I don't think we'd need this much to pay the servants. Besides, don't you need them to build your new estate? Shouldn't you save these gold coins for that instead?"

"Stop worrying so much and just take the money," Link said to his sister. "I'll find the way to build my estate, so you don't have to worry about it. Right now, you must focus

on adapting to your new life."

"Alright, then," replied Molly. She then took the money pouch from Link with a light and gladdened heart. She never knew how good it felt to be spoiled by a family member who cared for her happiness.

For the rest of the journey, Link didn't even read or study his magic textbooks as he usually did. All he wanted to do was chat leisurely with his mother about what he'd encountered and experienced out in the world. Molly was listening to them quietly at first. Then she gradually loosened up and joined in the conversation occasionally. All in all, the three of them had a pleasant journey to the River Cove Town as everyone was finally relaxed and happy.

As Link was bringing his family back to River Cove Town, a carriage with a green leaf emblem was entering the East Cove Magic Academy. Inside was a middle-aged man with plain looks but magnificent clothes who was holding a Mithril necklace in his left hand and a magic bracelet in his right hand, both with an exquisite flying bird mark on them, signifying that it was made by Link. The man's name was Warter. He was the owner of the prosperous Green Leaf Merchant Firm.

As he stepped into the academy, Warter was immediately confronted with the awesome sight of tall and pristine Mage Towers reaching up into the clouds. Yet there was only one thing in his mind.

This Magician Link has been creating piece after piece of magic gear that could even put the old masters to shame, thought Warter. If I could somehow persuade him to work with me, my fame and fortune would no doubt spread throughout the kingdom!

As a consummate merchant, the wonders of magic and spells meant nothing to him, and neither did he have any real respect for Magicians. There was only one aim in his mind, and that was to get all the money there was on the Firuman continent into his pockets.

Chapter 158

Monetary Incentive (1)

When Link reached River Cove Town, the carriage stopped right in front of the base of the Flamingo Band of Mercenaries. Link was surprised to find Lucy already waiting for him at the entrance. It seemed like the mercenary band had once again extended their influence over River Cove Town. That was good news.

It had been a month and the base had undergone great changes. The yard was expanded to an area three times larger than before. The nameplate was also replaced by one made of pure copper, with a logo of the flamingo outlined by silver wires above it. The wooden fence had also received an upgrade to a wall made from boulders. There were now two gates before the main entrance of the mercenary base. The first layer was a wooden door entangled with vines and copper nails. The second layer was a steel fence. This not only improved the base defensive capabilities but was also aesthetically pleasing. The mercenaries walking in and out of the base were clad in a wolf leather armor and a premium steel sword. This equipment was almost on par with the military. They looked extremely high-spirited and walked with confident strides.

This was the mercenary base that he had envisioned. It seemed like it was not a wasted investment.

Link was extremely satisfied.

The moment he alighted from the carriage, Link smiled at Lucy and commended, "This is better than what I expected."

"It is the result of spending a huge amount of money. We spent nearly 1000 gold coins on just 200 members." Lucy was very satisfied with the results as well. She just felt that it was slightly extravagant.

Link laughed, "Gold coins are meant to be used. If we save them all, they will just be useless metal chips."

Lucy bit her lips reluctantly. She knew that she could never persuade Link to save his

money. She could only try to save as much as she could on her side in case of emergencies.

At the same time, Lilith and Molly also alighted the carriage. Link then introduced them, "This is my mother, Lilith and my sister, Molly. They will be staying with the mercenary band for a while."

Lucy immediately greeted Lilith and Molly with respect the moment she knew they were Link's close relatives. She then introduced herself, "Madame, Miss, I am a follower of my lord, Link. I am a Lucy, a swordswoman."

Lucy was wearing a premium alligator skin armor and had a magic sword enveloped in a light white glow on her back. She exuded a valiant and elegant aura, one that was completely different from the sweaty and rude mercenaries that Lilith was used to. She couldn't help but commend, "This is fantastic. This lady looks extremely suave."

Lucy felt uncomfortable listening to this comment. Since she became a mercenary, she was described as a cold-blooded beauty, an ice rose and other elegant names fitting for a woman. This was the first time someone described her as suave. She kept her displeasure in as the comment came from Link's mother.

Molly was slightly afraid as Lucy's presence was way too intimidating. She felt like she was facing a giant, the oppressive aura charging straight towards her. Molly stood behind Link the entire time, stealing glances at this beautiful woman every now and then.

Molly was extremely envious of Lucy. Lucy was independent and strong and furthermore, she seemed to be her brother's capable assistant.

My brother has really made it. He has so many followers. On the other hand, I accomplished nothing. Molly suddenly felt inferior. She blamed the life of fear and manipulation that she had in the castle.

Link led Molly and Lilith into the mercenary band. On the way, he carefully gave some instructions to Lucy. By the time they reached the hall, Link handed a huge bag of money to Lucy. There was a grand total of 1000 gold coins in the bag, dedicated to Molly's and Lilith's spending in the mercenary band.

Lucy received the money bag and gave Link the assurance he needed, "Rest assured, my lord. I will make no mistakes. Madame and Miss will be provided with only the

best!"

Link had complete faith in Lucy's competency. He then turned and assured his family members that he would visit them often.

After his family members settled in, Link's face became serious as he talked about issues regarding his territory development.

"Lucy, the king has conferred me the title of a Baron. The Ferde Wilderness in the Southeast is now my territory. I am planning to invest resources into the development of this area. Before that, some preparations have to be done."

Lucy was slightly startled before a look of excitement appeared on her face. Since Link had become an official noble, as his follower, she would have the chance to become an official female knight.

Knights were also considered nobles by normal standards. Lucy was born in a rural village and becoming a noble was something that only happened in her dreams. She was extremely relieved that she had chosen to follow Link.

Lucy was not concerned about how barren and remote the Ferde Wilderness was. No matter the state of the land, it was still a territory that belonged solely to Link. They simply needed to spend more effort into building and developing the land. Thinking back, they similarly built their mercenary band from scratch. Nothing was impossible as long as Link supported them!

She immediately asked, "My lord, what do you need me to do?"

"The initial stages will be pretty simple. Send a few capable people to map out the Ferde Wilderness terrain. I will also need them to indicate the presence of any criminals, bandits or forces that are in the area. My aim is to make sure that ordinary people will be safe even when they walk on the streets at night. They should not have to fear about the possibility of an attack."

"Not a problem. The map will at most take a month," Lucy assured. This was a task that mercenaries were most capable of.

Link nodded. "That would be great. After the map is completed, start to chase the bandits out of the area. You, Jacker, Gildern and the rest may have to increase the training intensity of the mercenary band."

Lucy's heart was racing. She had gotten the underlying message of this mission. Link was prepared to make the Flamingo Band of Mercenaries the guardians of the new territory. If they were successful, they would become an official mercenary band, and she would be it's general!

With a pair of glimmering eyes, Lucy straightened her body and declared, "My lord, the Flamingo Band of Mercenary will be the sword in your hand! We will not disappoint you."

Link nodded and said, "Alright. I have some urgent matters to attend to and have to leave for East Cove Higher Magic Academy immediately."

He had settled all the matters he wanted to and bade his family goodbye before leaving the mercenary base. The three women naturally sent him off and watched as he boarded the carriage.

With a few kicks of the hooves, the carriage was headed towards the academy.

Lucy watched as the carriage moved further away till it was out of her field of vision. My lord is getting busier; he seems to be always in a hurry.

Her gaze then fell onto Lilith and Molly and she immediately felt better. Link had left his mother and sister in her care, suggesting that he had complete faith in her. Also, this might mean that Link would come back more often in the future.

Lucy then gently urged, "Madame, Miss, please follow me."

...

East Cove Higher Magic Academy

Warter had already reached the entrance of Herrera's Mage Tower. This was not his first time in the magic academy, however, it was his most nervous one yet.

Before he knocked, he couldn't help but think, Will there be other merchants who have already approached him? What will I do if he refuses? What if he offers a ridiculous condition?

He was feeling uneasy.

He was usually calm and collected, but the success of this trip was way too important for him

Link's enchanting skills were top notch, so much so that words could not capture the beauty of his products. He was a true enchanting master, especially when compared to the other enchanters who acquired fame through marketing techniques instead of real skill.

Furthermore, there was a sudden influx of high-quality magic equipment and intricate magic scrolls in the market. All of them had a special magic marking on them. Warter gathered important information from these traits.

This young Magician was at his peak and at the same time, he desperately needed money!

This meant there he would still be crafting a huge amount of magic equipment for sale. If Warter could strike a deal with Link, his Green Leaf Merchant Firm would definitely benefit, and make their name known outside of Hot Springs City. They might even expand their influence outside of the Norton Kingdom and become a threat to the merchants of the Southern Free Trade Alliance.

He was naturally nervous in the face of such a huge opportunity.

After three whole minutes of apprehension standing at the entrance, he took a deep breath and gently knocked on the tower door.

He made sure the sound was light. He knew that all the Magician's Apprentices were arrogant and did not like to be disturbed.

After a few seconds, the door opened. A beautiful and cheerful little girl stood behind the door and stared at him curiously. She asked, "You are...?"

Warter had seen many people in his life, but it was his first time seeing such an exquisite little girl. It took him a moment before he replied, "Warter. My name is Warter and I am in charge of a merchant firm. It is called the Green Leaf Merchant Firm and I am here to look for Magician Link."

"Looking for my master?" The little girl was Rylai. She frowned slightly upon hearing Warter's words and shook her head. "That is really unfortunate. My master is not in at the moment."

"Ah..." Warter was disappointed. However, he still had not given up all hope, "Can you tell me where he went?"

The little girl was vigilant and replied immediately, "That is not possible."

Her master had many enemies. That was why Auntie Moira repeatedly reminded her that she should never inform others about her master's whereabouts, especially to outsiders.

Warter looked at the little girl's determined expression and knew that he could no longer get any information from her. If he were in Hot Springs City, he might be able to exchange some information using gold coins. However, his wealth was nothing in the magic academy. All the Magicians here would merely look down on him and continue on with their daily tasks. He was already fortunate to be able to hold such a long conversation with this girl.

Warter's heart sank. He thought that he had found a huge opportunity, but it did not work out in the end. He couldn't help but sigh from the disappointment.

"Thank you." Warter was prepared to wait at the entrance of the academy until Link returned. He would not let this be a wasted trip. To his surprise, he saw a black-haired young man walking towards him the moment he turned around.

At the same time, the voice of the little girl rang from behind, "Master, you are back so early this time! Didn't you say it was going to take half a month?"

That person was none other than Link.

Chapter 159

Monetary Incentive (2)

Warter's ears pricked up the instant he heard Rylai uttering the word "tutor". A friendly smile appeared on his face and he instantly bent his head forward and rushed up towards the figure the girl had just addressed as tutor.

"Sir," he said reverently, "it is such an honor to meet you."

Warter glanced at the man before him as he spoke. What he saw was a very young-looking man with black hair and black eyes whose looks were plain and unremarkable. Had it not been for the ink-blue Magician's robe he was wearing and the wand in his hand, Warter was sure this young man could disappear on a busy street full of people. The only striking features on this young man were his eyes.

His eyes were exceptionally dark, yet they were so clear that they seemed to glow. At first sight, Warter thought they shone with the innocence of a child, but after getting a closer look, he realized that they were, in fact, as deep as and as dark as the night sky. They were so deep that one could never fathom the bottom of their depths no matter how long they stared at them.

Just then, Warter suddenly felt a certain kind of frightening pressure exerted by the eyes on him. He was taken aback by the mysterious power this young man exuded and was forced to look down to avoid those terrifying eyes.

I guess the rumors were right, he thought. Magicians do indeed have powerful souls that could shatter a weak-willed spirit with a glance.

As a merchant, Warter had, in his younger years, been a traveling salesman who'd journeyed all around the kingdom. He'd seen many things in his travels, so he realized how mistaken he had been in underestimating Link just because of his young age.

"Who are you?" asked Link, slightly puzzled at the presence of a stranger in the Mage Tower.

"Oh, forgive my manners. I'm Warter," he said. "I own the Green Leaf Merchant Firm,

and I've come to discuss matters of business with you." As he spoke, Warter slid out the Mithril necklace in front of Link. He could guess by Link's reaction that it was indeed his creation.

Link could see through Warter's motives for coming here in a heartbeat. He must've been attracted by his own enchantment skills and wanted to use them to attract more gold coins into his pockets.

For what it's worth, this man is shrewd, thought Link. But even though he was impressed with the man's cunning, he would still need to prove his sincerity to Link before he would agree to cooperate with him. Besides, Link was in a rush to meet with his tutor on urgent business right now, so he had no time to entertain the merchant's proposals just yet.

"Follow me," said Link.

"Ah...yes, sir." Warter saw that there was hope so he acted even more reverent now and followed closely behind Link into the Mage Tower.

Rylai kept talking to Link all along the way, telling him about the recent happenings in the academy, then asking him questions about magic. Link replied now and then with a smile constantly on his face. He listened intently to Rylai's retelling of what occurred in the academy while he was gone. As for her questions, Link managed to answer them all in short and clear replies while Rylai listened to him with bright shining eyes, her face showing the utmost respect for her tutor.

Once they reached inside the Mage Tower, all the apprentices they walked past would immediately bow at Link no matter what they were doing at the time. On their faces Link saw a hint of respect and awe that hadn't been there before. Link found this change curious, although he didn't get to ask the question before Rylai offered the answer herself.

"Everyone heard of what happened in Jade Street, tutor," she said. "You saved the High Elf prince's life and even defeated three Dark Elves! All the Magicians in the academy were impressed with you – even Dean Anthony had lavished praise on you himself!"

Two days ago, the king had sent special envoys to the academy to deliver Link's rewards and publicly announced his contributions to the kingdom, so the matter was public knowledge now. Naturally the Magicians in the academy could understand the

significance of Link's achievements even more than lay people as they were more rational and had more knowledge of what went on in magic battles.

Three Dark Elves – one was a Level-5 Warrior, one was a Level-4 Magician, and the other one was a Level-4 Assassin – made up the infamous Three Musketeers of the Silver Moon. They were the leaders of the younger generation of Dark Elves in the Black Forest and were feared all over for their formidable power. And yet, Link had single-handedly killed two of them and forced the remaining one to flee for her life – how could anyone possess such a mighty force?

The Magicians were proud people, especially among their peers. Regardless of their talents, they would always be driven to compete with each other. But this time though, Link's achievements were just too exceptional that they knew there was no way they could ever compare. Magicians of the same age as Link were still competing to see whose magic scrolls were better and who could produce more of them. Meanwhile, Link Link had already reached the point where his talents had eclipsed that of the notorious Three Musketeers of the Silver Moon and were acknowledged by King Leon himself!

How could they not respect such an exceptional figure?

The Magicians outside Herrera's Mage Tower were somewhat more reserved in their show of respect to Link. But everyone knew him well here inside the Mage Tower; they even took pride in the fact that a godlike powerful figure had emerged in their own Mage Tower, so they weren't shy at all in showing him the utmost respect that even bordered on reverence.

This was just human nature, although, in Warter's eyes the sight was quite a bit more astonishing. He grew ever more worried now about the future that might be in store if he ended up cooperating with such a prominent figure.

Has he achieved such a degree of fame and reputation already? Warter mused. What kind of ridiculous demands would he make of me?

Although Link was proud of the respect he earned from the Magician's Apprentices in the academy, he was quiet and introverted in nature so there was not a trace of arrogance in his expressions. He even bowed slightly in return to all those who bowed at him along the way.

Warter immediately sighed in relief at this sight. He seems like a humble young man, he thought. He shouldn't be too difficult to deal with if we do end up working with each other.

With those thoughts in his mind, Warter followed Link right up to the second floor of the Mage Tower. Once they reached the top of the stairs, Link turned around and addressed Warter with an apologetic tone of voice.

"Mr. Warter," he said, "there is an urgent matter that I must report to my tutor without delay, so I must leave you for a moment. Would you mind waiting in the hall?"

"No, no problem at all!" Warter hurriedly shook his head in reply.

"Rylai, please take care of Mr. Warter while I'm gone," said Link.

"Leave it to me, tutor," replied Rylai. She then smilingly turned to Warter and said, "This way, mister. You should try a popular beverage here in this Mage Tower, it's called 'Living Bubbles' and it's amazing. I'm sure you'll love it when you try it!"

"Um... yes, I'll try it. Thank you," replied Warter reluctantly. He didn't have the heart to refuse the offer. He wasn't sure if the young girl was right in guessing that he would like it by the sound of the name given to this drink.

Meanwhile, Link was already climbing up the stairs towards the top floor. He could hear the sound of the Elemental Pool being used as he passed it. Link knew that it must be Eliard inside working hard as always.

Once she reached the fourth floor, Link took out his wand and activated the runes on Herrera's door. He was lucky this time as the door opened after a few seconds. Voices could be heard coming from the sitting room which got Link curious as he didn't expect Herrera to have company. He quickened his footsteps slightly and rushed up into the sitting room.

The moment he made the turn around the wall between the door and Herrera's sitting room, Link was met with the sight of two people there – well, to be exact, there were actually a human and a young female dwarf there. From the way she dressed, the dwarf seemed to be a Magician as well.

Link focused all his attention to sense both of their Mana energy. In seconds, he could see that his tutor, Herrera had reached the early stages of Level-6, while that dwarf

was already at the pinnacle of Level-6 and would break through into Level-7 soon. This meant that she was even more powerful than Herrera!

Link was shocked by this knowledge. What was going on now? Was Firuman so full of young gifted Magicians that they could be found anywhere? This dwarf girl couldn't be more than 18 or 19 years old! How could she possess such powerful Mana?

The two people in the room turned their heads towards Link immediately as they heard his footsteps.

"Speak of the devil," said Herrera with a gentle smile on her face without a hint of surprise at all. "Here you are."

The dwarf girl, on the other hand, showed great curiosity in her expression as she looked Link up and down. She was slightly more than three-feet-tall, just around the same height as an eight or nine-year-old human girl. She had a face that looked noble and dignified and her skin was as smooth as the surface of a vase. What stood out the most, though, was her light blue eyes that looked so bright and pure that they could even make someone think of gouging them out and treasure them like a pair of jewels.

"So that's your favorite disciple, huh?" said the dwarven girl with a chuckle. "He looks so plain and ordinary." Her voice was crisp and somewhat similar to a human child in its innocence, yet it was mixed with a more mature depth as well, giving it a quaint and unforgettable quality.

Herrera knew that she was just joking, so she made no response to her jibes and went on to introduce her to Link.

"Link, this is Elin," she said, "the Lady Fortuna of the Yabba race."

The Yabba race was the official name for the group of people humans commonly called dwarves, admittedly with a hint of ridicule and contempt. Lady Fortuna on the other hand...Link shuddered at the mention of these two words. Now it was no wonder that she was exuding such strong Mana.

Lady Fortuna of the Yabba race was a genius Magician born of the power of mystical destiny. Her most powerful talent was in the secret spell of prophecy, and because of this the Yabba people held her in very high regard.

In his previous life, Link encountered Lady Fortuna eight years after the release of the

game. By then, the Yabba race was almost completely wiped off of the face of the earth by the Dark Elves and the Army of Darkness. Their Lady Fortuna was completely different from the innocent little girl in front of him. She had suffered through unspeakable torture by the Dark Side and had been so disfigured that she hid herself under a thick cloak.

"The glory of light is dead. Darkness has descended. All I see in the future is a world completely covered in pitch-black darkness." Those were the words players would hear from Elin as they first chanced upon her, and she would utter them in a voice that was steeped in sorrow.

Link had once completed a series of tasks Elin had issued in the game which involved the searching and collecting of magic materials. Once all the materials were gathered Elin would reveal the very last prophecy in her life.

In her prophetic vision, the Lord of the Deep Nozama and his army had descended upon the Realm of Light and the human race was on the verge of annihilation. All the ten thousand Magicians in the High Elves Magic Legion were killed in battle. The entire Realm of Light had entered the apocalypse.

After seeing this final vision, it was as if Elin's Mana was exhausted of its limits and her soul had reached a breaking point. She would then sacrifice the remnant of her soul to the player and give them an eternal blessing to always uphold the virtue of the God of Light.

"I give up, forgive me."

Those were the last words Elin whispered before she collapsed and died. Her black cloak fell away and revealed a body so mutilated by torture that it was a miracle she hadn't shattered to pieces long before.

This was one of the top ten most harrowing and heart-breaking missions in the game. Countless female players shed bitter tears for Elin's tragic death and went on to swear with fire in their hearts that they would save the world.

Link himself had been deeply shaken by the incident. He could clearly recall how he vowed to himself that he would not rest until Nozama was defeated!

But that was another world in another life, things might turn out differently here after all. Link immediately shook his head to wake himself up from his brooding and bowed

respectfully at Elin.

"It's an honor to meet you, Madam," said Link.

"No, no, no!" interjected Elin jokingly while shaking her head. "Don't call me 'Madam'! I'm only a 25-year-old little girl!" The Yabbas usually had a lifespan of up to 150 years old and they only reached adulthood at age 30, in which case Elin was in fact a girl and not yet an adult.

Link's face almost turned crimson with embarrassment as he noticed the faux pas he'd just committed.

Herrera noticed how awkward things were getting, so she swooped in to the rescue.

"Stop it, Elin," she said. "Didn't you come all this way just to meet him?"

"Alright, Winnie, I'll stop teasing your favorite disciple," said Elin. (Winnie was the name Herrera's closest friends called her by.)

"Winnie wrote in her letter to me saying she'd found the Lord of Light's Chosen One," said Elin, her playful expressions now all gone and replaced with a serious one. "I have to admit that I didn't believe her at all. That is why I've come here – to meet the person who'd won such high praise from Winnie."

By then, Link had managed to calm himself down. He walked slowly to a chair nearby and took a seat.

"But the God of Light works in mysterious ways," Link said, smiling. "How would mortals like us ever manage to see through his schemes? I'm sorry, but I'm afraid I don't know how to prove to you if I'm really the Chosen One."

"Don't worry," said Elin, "I have my own method." As she spoke, Elin took out a stack of cards that seemed to be of pristine quality. The cards even shone slightly with the aura of magic, giving it a mysterious air.

As Link stared at the cards a notification appeared on the interface.

Tarot Cards of the Soul

Quality: Epic

Effects: A tool of divination created with the power of Lady Fortuna's soul. There are a total of 66 cards, and this tool has a strong prophetic power.

(Note: This is an item exclusive to Lady Fortuna.)

"I need a drop of your blood," said Elin as she laid out the Tarot cards one-by-one on the table.

Chapter 160

Monetary Incentive (3)

The fourth floor of Herrera's Mage Tower.

There were a total of 66 tarot cards in Elin's deck. She divided them into two separate rows, one with 22 cards and the other with 44 cards. They were placed face down on the table in a fan-shaped formation.

As Elin needed a drop of blood for her spell and clearly meant no harm, Link stretched out his hand. She skillfully pricked Link with a silver needle and a drop of blood appeared at his fingertip. The blood then floated in the air and dispersed into a cloud of mist the moment it was directly on top of the tarot cards.

Elin closed her eyes and flailed her hands randomly within the blood mist. From time to time, she would vocalize a few words with a trembling voice. "A...ba...salo...ji..."

If one were to ignore the increasing intensity of the mysterious aura surrounding her, she would look downright insane.

After half a minute, the blood mist hovering on top of the tarot cards split into two portions as though it was alive, each charging straight into a separate row of cards. Elin then opened her eyes. She looked slightly drained and the soft green glow in her eyes seemed to have dimmed greatly. Before she flipped open the tarot cards, she said, "The cards can predict your future. I have heard that you have chosen a barren land as your territory. If you are indeed the Chosen One, the Yabba race would offer you some help in the development of your land."

"What if I'm not?" Link smiled. If the Yabba race was willing to help, it would exponentially speed up and improve the development process.

The Yabba people were the most outstanding magic mechanics in the world. They had ridiculous achievements in the area of architecture, building a large number of buildings that were magnificent enough to be termed as wonders. Their help would not only improve the quality, but also the speed of Link's territory construction.

"If you aren't then the deal is off." Elin gave a cheeky smile before pulling out the cards selected by the blood mist. She then avoided Herrera's and Link's gaze before checking them carefully.

As she flipped open the cards, she explained, "The power of fate is extremely delicate and mysterious. Any minute changes may affect the result drastically. Therefore, I am the only one who can look at this. Wait a minute, this is..." Elin eyes suddenly widened, her gaze alternating between the cards in her hand and Link, who was right in front of her. She looked as if she had seen something incredible.

She had two cards in her hand.

The first card was the main card, showing a bright sun in the middle. This was the best main card anyone could hope for as it symbolized hope, light and inner peace.

The second card was the auxiliary card. This card showed a king holding a scepter, representing authority, passion, sincerity and creativity.

This was also the best auxiliary card!

From all the prophecies Elin had done, these cards were only chosen in extremely rare cases. Even if they were, only one of them would appear, while the other accompanying card would usually be something extremely poor.

Elin, who specialized in the power of prophecy, knew very well that it was almost impossible for these two cards to appear at once. This was due to the innate contradictory properties of these two cards.

If a person had great authority, he was bound to be absorbed into the vortex of power struggle. Coupled with his passion and creativity, it would be almost impossible to achieve inner peace.

This was merely one aspect of the contradiction. A wise person might be able to reconcile the differences between these two cards and find the fine balance. However, there was another important reason that prevented the concurrent appearance of the two cards.

That was the hidden meaning behind this pair of cards.

When the sun, the scepter and the king appeared simultaneously in a person's fate, it

only meant one thing—they would become the Savior!

What was a Savior?

Even when the entire world was on an unstoppable trajectory towards the abyss and every living creature was suffering a tragic fate, the Savior would be the only person that possessed the power to put a stop to the madness!

It was important to maintain inner peace when practicing prophecy spells. Elin had been trained to never show her emotions no matter the results she saw from the cards.

Even when she was predicting her own fate which showed that she would go through great suffering and even the destruction of the entire Yabba race, she only frowned ever so slightly and felt a twinge of sadness in her heart.

However, this was an exception. When the person destined to be a Savior was right in front of her, she could no longer stay calm. This was because her fate, the tragic fate of her entire race could be altered!

After a full 30 seconds in shock, Elin suddenly moved and quickly mixed the cards in her hand into the rest of the tarot cards on the table. She then hastily shuffled the deck to make it impossible for anyone to tell the two cards she had just picked out. Even though he was the Savior, his power still had not fully matured. She had to keep the results of this prophecy to herself in order to protect him!

"What's the matter, Elin?" Herrera was clearly shocked by her exaggerated actions. What kind of prophecy would make a Level-6 Magician this flustered?

Elin had slightly regained her composure and gave a slight cough before continuing, "I'm sorry, Link. The cards showed that you are not the Chosen One."

"That is not possible!" Herrera was puzzled. She had seen the brilliance of God in the depths of Link's soul. "Elin, could you be mistaken?"

Elin was immediately enraged. She shouted with a flushed face, "Do not insult my prophecy magic! It is never wrong!"

"Alright, alright, I'm sorry," Herrera hurriedly apologized.

Elin did not pursue the matter any further and turned to look at Link, "However, since

we are friends, the cooperation might still be possible if you are willing to pay. When I return back to the Yabba Mountains (The hometown of the Yabba race, North of the Norton Kingdom, Adjacent to the Dark Elves Forest), I can still afford to send you a batch of our finest engineers."

Link thought it was an extremely good plan. He was totally not concerned about the issue of the Chosen One. To him, it was nothing more than a title.

Even if he was the Chosen One, the God of Light would not be able to descend onto the World of Firuman to aid him in battle. If he wasn't, the game system would still continue to help him navigate through this unfamiliar world. In any case, Herrera was already certain that he was the Chosen One. It was enough to see that the result of Elin's prophecy was not sufficient to affect her judgment.

As for Elin's offer to help with the construction of his territory, Link was extremely elated. He nodded in excitement and said, "Money is not a problem. I can fund the construction with my enchanting skills."

Herrera nodded as well. "Link has outstanding talent in enchanting magic. His enchantment speed is extremely fast and he never fails to create exquisite designs. He is very skilled."

Elin had no doubt about Link's abilities at all. She immediately nodded and said, "If that is the case, I will start selecting the engineers the moment I return."

"Thank you." Link was satisfied.

"Just a small gesture," Elin replied. She then fell silent and stared blankly into her deck of tarot cards, huddling in the chair.

Elin's actions were definitely out of the ordinary. However, Herrera chose to leave her alone and turned towards Link. "You are back early this time. Did anything happen?"

Link nodded and took out a sword, staff and a dagger from his dimensional pendant. They belonged to the Dark Elf Warrior Norisa, Magician Parsons and Assassin Hedel respectively. Lastly, he took out Parsons dimensional bracelet and placed them on the table.

Dark Elves equipment were extremely recognizable by their characteristics. They were always black or bright red in color and would be enchanted with a layer of dark

aura.

Herrera's eyes widened upon seeing this equipment. She asked, "What's going on?"

Elin, who was in a daze, also took a glance at the equipment before staring back at her deck of cards. However, her tiny ears were already erected, clearly interested in the background of these weapons.

Link then explained in detail his trip back to the Morani castle. As he mentioned about the Black Moon Conspiracy, Herrera already had a tight frown on her face. By the time he reached the part about Demon Tarviss, Herrera was unable to contain her fear anymore and covered her delicate mouth with her hands.

"Tarviss? Didn't he get banished by the Legendary Magician Bryant?"

It was Link's turn to feel perplexed. There was a discrepancy between the history he knew and the current timeline. In the game, Tarviss was merely sealed in an unknown area within East Cove Higher Magic Academy. Had he truly been banished in this timeline?

They were two completely different scenarios.

However, it didn't take him long before he understood. The incident happened over 100 years ago and the story had been passed down through many generations. There was bound to be some deviation from the original. As Herrera had not entered the core layer of leadership in the Magic Academy, it was natural for her to not know the truth.

Link then said, "Why don't we convey this message to Dean Anthony?"

"We have to; I will go now!" Herrera was flustered. Demon Tarviss was a Legendary creature. If the Dark Elves were successful in releasing him, it would definitely be a catastrophe, probably one that could destroy the entire magic academy.

She immediately stood up and left before turning back to collect the Dark Elves equipment Link had brought back with him. She then turned to Elin and said apologetically, "Elin, I have something urgent to attend to. I cannot accompany you anymore."

Elin simply smiled and started putting away her tarot cards. Then she jumped down

from her chair and said, "That's fine, please get busy. I should also be returning to the Yabba Mountains as Link probably needs my engineer team soon. Can you let Link send me off?"

"Of course. Link?"

"Yes, master." Link stood up and respectfully ushered Elin out of the hall, with Herrera following behind. When they reached the first floor, Link saw the merchant, Warter drinking at the bar. He seemed to be enjoying himself.

Link ignored him and continued walking towards the entrance.

When they exited the Mage Tower, Herrera made a beeline for the Heaven's Thorn while Link accompanied Elin as they walked along the path leading towards the Griffins Railing.

Elin had restored her previous cheeky and cheery demeanor. She smiled at Link and said, "Link, I've heard that the Ferde Wilderness is extremely barren. Apart from having no natural resources, there are also all kinds of heinous criminals hiding in the area. Isn't it very expensive to develop the land there?"

Link threw his hands out helplessly and said, "That is a fact."

"Do you want me to help you?" Elin looked at Link with a haughty expression. She seemed to think she had a vantage point over Link.

"I think I have the solution to the problem." Link pretended not to hear her.

Elin pouted, "You're such a boring man. After all, I am still your senior. It is only polite to give you a gift on our first meeting. This is for you! It can probably sell for some money."

She made a slight action with her hand and a glowing red metal enveloped by a red mist appeared in her hands. The metal was almost as large as a fist and would occasionally sparkle under the sun.

"This is...a Fire Star Thorium!" Link was shocked.

Chapter 161

Monetary Incentive (4)

Fire Star Thorium

Quality: EpicMetal Summary: Fire Star Thorium is the perfect alloy consisting of thorium

and fire elements which act as a superconductor for Mana. It has a very stable structure that makes it ideal as a component for eternal magic seals. It is especially effective for fire element spells!

(Note: It can only be found in Tybo Volcano at the Yabba Mountain Range.)

Not only was there no other place in the world to get Fire Star Thorium, it was also a type of metal that could not be created artificially. It was precisely for this reason that the metal was inconceivably expensive. In the world of humans, only most of the users of the metal were high-level Magicians, and it was rarely available in the mass market.

The metal was priced at 2840 gold coins per ounce in the Magician's District in Springs City, and it was one of the very few precious metals that was worth more than a thousand gold coins per ounce. Almost no one else other than the high-level Magicians could afford or had any use for such a ridiculously priced item.

What reason would Elin have for bringing out a lump of Fire Star Thorium that was as big as a baby's fist? Thorium was an extremely dense metal, only a cubic foot of the metal would weigh close to a ton, so that lump of Fire Star Thorium Elin had there must weigh more than two pounds!

At that moment even the ever calm Link was flabbergasted. This lump of Fire Star Thorium must cost at least around a hundred thousand gold coins! Even the annual income of the royal Abel family was only 130,000 gold coins! It was just a gift that was too precious and too expensive for Link to accept in good conscience.

"No, I can't accept this," Link said.

This wasn't just about the gift being too precious. There was no free lunch in the world, so he knew that he would be under some kind of obligation if he received this gift. Although Link wanted the Fire Star Thorium more than anything, he was afraid that he might have to spend all his life to pay for this debt of gratitude.

Nothing could prepare him for the way Elin reacted to his refusal, though.

Elin had been smiling and laughing just moments ago, yet the second she heard Link, her expression changed. She silently put the Fire Star Thorium back in her pouch, then tugged at Link's sleeve and looked up at him with those pair of eyes that were brimming with tears.

"Why don't you want my gifts?" she said with a pout. "You despise me, don't you?"

"..." Link just couldn't wrap his head around this little dwarf's moods. One minute she was happy and joking around, and next minute she was crying and throwing tantrums. How would he deal with this girl?

"That's not... I didn't mean it that way..." Link tried to explain.

"Yes you did!" Elin then exploded into a loud wail. "Aaahhh...I know you despise me! You must think that I'm too short and I'm too small and that's why you don't like me!" Elin's voice was very loud now, and she'd attracted the wrong attention from everyone around and causing them to misunderstand the situation.

Several Magicians who just happened to pass by had heard Elin's words and they suddenly gave Link and Elin a peculiar kind of gaze that showed their confusion of the kind of drama going on between the two.

Can humans and dwarves have that kind of relationship? Some people thought. But the size is just wrong...

Isn't that the famous Link who's in the limelight recently? How did he attract a dwarf girl?

Morality is dead! That was the idea that came into the head of an old-fashioned gentleman Magician passing by.

Although none of these Magicians had voiced their thoughts, their gazes were enough to express what they were thinking in their heads. Link never thought that he would

be caught in such an embarrassing situation, even less so with a powerful Level-6 Master Magician – all because he'd refused her gift!

For a time, Link was so confused that he could neither stand still nor walk away. Once Elin saw how her actions had produced an effect on Link, she smiled mischievously and stopped her crying for a while.

"So, are you going to accept it now?" she said as she leaned forward. "If you still refuse then I'll keep on making so much noise you'll be the talk of the town tomorrow."

"...give it here then," said Link as he massaged his temple with his fingers. He was considerably shocked at how adept Elin was at getting her way.

Link's words had just left his lips when he felt something warm touching his hand. He turned to look at it and realized that Elin had slid the lump of priceless Fire Star Thorium into his palm.

The Fire Star Thorium was naturally warm, yet now Link somehow felt as if it was a lump of hot coal and he just wanted to throw it away as far as he could. But then he turned around and saw Elin's doe-eyed face. Even though he knew that she had faked her crying, he still couldn't help but feel sorry for her. She had looked genuinely miserable with the tears streaming from those innocent blue eyes, not to mention how childlike she looked when she sniffled with her pert, little nose. She looked nothing like someone who'd just put an act on.

This sight had reminded Link of the tragic history of the Yabba race in the game. He then thought of the fate of this young dwarf who was also the mighty and wise Lady Fortuna, and he could instantly understand the despair she must be keeping hidden behind her tantrums and jibes.

This little girl is a prophet, so she must've seen a vision of the future, Link thought. She must've seen the unspeakable suffering she must go through, not to mention the catastrophe that would befall her people. What she is doing now is probably her way to find a reliable ally for the Yabba race... But why did she choose me?

The moment this question occurred in his mind Link was reminded of Elin's strange reactions when she picked out the Tarot cards earlier.

I got it now, that prophecy earlier must've proven that I really am the God of Light's Chosen One. Elin had to conceal the details of the prophecy because she feared the

knowledge would disrupt the path of destiny that dictates the events of the future.

When he thought of it this way, all of Elin's actions before this now seemed logical.

She indicated that she would help me set up a team immediately and created an opportunity for us to be alone to give me this invaluable Fire Star Thorium. Even though she verbally denied my identity as the Chosen One, her actions were more than enough proof that she supports me.

Link sighed as he realized Elin's true motives. He was reminded of that fire in his soul he felt when he received Lady Fortuna's blessings from her soul in the game when he completed the last task that she set out for the player.

I must defeat the Lord of the Deep, Nozama!

That was what he thought then. With that strong conviction, he marched forward in the game and eventually led his comrades to successfully defeat Nozama before he descended upon the Realm of Light.

Now that he really was in this world, Link wondered if he would shirk away from such a terrifying mission? No, he would not. It was too late for that now.

That being the case, what reason would he have to refuse the Yabba people's offer of alliance? Hadn't his principle in doing things always been to gather as many available helpful forces as possible anyway?

With this thought in mind, Link became calm and the fog in his mind completely cleared away.

He then placed the warm lump of Fire Star Thorium inside his storage pendant. His mood was now back to normal. He even managed to smile a little as he patted Elin's head gently.

"Don't worry," he said, "I will never forget how much you've helped me today."

Can his mind be that sharp? Elin thought with surprise. She could sense the changes in Link's manners as she raised her head to look up at him. She saw how the eyes that could see through a soul had now turned into a pair of kind and gentle ones. She immediately understood that Link had guessed her true motives.

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have forced you, but I..." Elin said no more. She knew that Link understood her sentiments perfectly.

Initially, when she saw the vision of her people's fate, she suppressed her emotions because she knew that she only had the power to see the future but none to change it. In that case, all she could do was accept the fate.

But now that she found the savior who would rescue the world from eternal darkness, she had begun to hope again. All the emotions she'd once suppressed exploded in one moment when she was acting up a scene just now. To be frank, even Elin herself was surprised at her almost mad behavior.

"You saw it, didn't you?" whispered Link. He was no longer angry at Elin for what she'd done. If it had been him in her shoes, Link thought he might do something a hundred times worse than what Elin did if it meant he could save his own people.

Elin shuddered for a moment at Link's question, but she soon found the words to reply him with.

"Will you save us?" she asked.

"To the best of my ability," replied Link. "The Yabba people are noble. The Realm of Light cannot afford to lose you."

Link and Elin's exchange would sound completely mysterious and perplexing to an outsider, but this was a conversation between one person who could see into the future and another person who had experienced the future before after all.

These two had powerful souls as well, so they had no need for many words, as that only accounted for a small part of their communication. Instead, they relied heavily on each other's gaze, expressions and the intonation of their voices which all conveyed more truthful and sincere information compared to mere words.

Because of that, both of them could now understand each other's thoughts and feelings, although they did not mention it out loud. The result was that both man and girl were already aware of each other's meaning, but they haven't said it out loud yet.

Those few short sentences had set a solid foundation of an alliance between the two, and now Elin had returned to her normal behavior. She wiped her tears with a slight feeling of embarrassment as she followed behind Link to the Griffin's railing and then

stepped onto the Griffin's back.

"Link!" Elin turned around and called out just as the Griffin was going to take off. "The sun will soon set beneath the horizon, and the light in the sky is nothing but just an afterglow."

"But the sun will rise again," replied Link.

Link's words brought a smile to Elin's little face, and her crystalline eyes shone again with the vibrancy of life. Although her lips were smiling, there were still signs of tears on her face. At that moment, she looked just as if she had walked out of a painting.

Then, the Griffin took off and rushed into the sky, flying into the distance towards the North. Link stood there watching the Griffin fly further and further away until it was nothing but a black dot in the sky. Only then did he turn away and head back to the Mage Tower.

He now had another valuable item in the storage pendant. This small lump of metal could smash the financial hurdle that prevented him from building his estate in one stroke. But as an enchantment Magician, would he ever use such a priceless material on a magic gear and sell it to someone else? Most definitely not!

I guess it's time to replace my Star Catcher wand, thought Link. Maybe I'll improve it a little and replace the Domingo crystal with a more superior crystal. It's an epic quality wand made with high-quality materials, so it should fetch me at least 20,000 gold coins. Then maybe I'll create a few pieces of jewelry to sell along with it, and that should cover the initial funds for my estate... oh, right, the merchant from Green Leaf Firm is waiting at the Mage Tower. I'd better get myself a good deal out of him.

Soon, Link was back at the Mage Tower. Warter was still sitting at the bare in the hall on the first floor, and in front of him was indeed a glass of the popular beverage Living Bubbles. Warter seemed to be enjoying himself with the bubbles that jumped around in his mouth.

As for Rylai, she had long gone to one of the tables in the hall and was hard at work studying a magic textbook.

Link had to walk right up to Warter before he realized that Link had returned.

"I'm sorry, sir," Warter said hurriedly, "are you free to see me now?"

"Yes, let's go to my room," replied Link. "We'll talk there."

"No problem at all." Warter then followed behind Link close at his heels.

Once they reached inside the room, Link poured two cups of water and placed it on the table. He then waited for Warter to settle down in his seat.

"I'm guessing my magic gear has caught your attention," said Link. "Before we move on, I have some questions for you. What is the scale of the Green Leaf Merchant Firm? Also, how do you plan to cooperate with me? Do you have any prominent figures who are your patrons that would guarantee the safety and continuous operation of your business?"

These three points were the most important factors in a business deal in Firuman, and Link's questions were all scrupulous and necessary. Warter was shocked at how wise this young man turned out to be. He knew just from these questions that no one would ever be able to take advantage or play tricks on Link.

Unfortunately for Warter, though, the Green Leaf Merchant Firm was only active in Springs City. It was basically an unknown entity outside of the capital. Furthermore, the firm only had one patron in the whole kingdom and he was just an old count who might not be able to protect the firm if it was ever faced with any serious threats.

In short, the firm's network was still in a primitive stage.

Warter began to feel his hopes of cooperating with Link diminish. Nevertheless, he still remained calm and polite with Link and started to tell Link of the history and current status of his merchant firm.

"This is how things stand, Mr. Link..." Warter then went into every detail that concerned his business venture and responded to each of Link's questions clearly and patiently. When he was finished, he sat upright and expected Link to respond with the simple yet portentous word – "no".

Link drummed his fingers gently on the table when Warter finished speaking as he considered his options.

"What is your proposal, then?" Link then asked.

The moment these words were uttered Warter immediately knew that he had a

chance.

"The moment you hand over your magic gear to me," he began, "I will pay you at an ordinary market price on the spot. Once it is sold, if there is a premium, I will pay you 10%—no, 15% of the selling price. That is to say, we won't just sell your creations for free, we would also pay you the additional gold coins we earned as well!"

Link was glad as he listened to the plan. He realized that this was no ordinary money-hungry salesman!

If all Warter wanted was to profit from Link's magic gear, he would've shown him the door right now. Yet this man was a visionary. He wanted to use Link's magic gear to build up the reputation of his firm and expand his business, and he didn't mind paying Link a high price as well. A man with such an entrepreneurial spirit was way ahead of his time! Someone like him could end up getting all the gold coins on the continent into his pockets if he was given the right opportunity. Naturally, Link wouldn't mind giving such a man just that opportunity.

"I want 20% of the profits," said Link. "That's not all, though. Your firm's background is too weak. After joining you, the East Cove Magic Academy will become your firm's official patron."

"It's a deal!" exclaimed Warter jubilantly.

Chapter 162

Anthony's Confidence

Link had just gotten a stable source of income and settled the export for his future magic equipment. This would mean that the initial funding for the building of his territory was solved. He was naturally in a good mood. On the other hand, in the Heaven's Thorn, Dean Anthony was deeply troubled.

In the parliament hall on the third floor of the Mage Tower, the Dark Elves' equipment was laid out on a circular table. On the other side of the table sat Anthony and Herrera.

"Premium gold magic sword, an anti-magic dagger and a Spiral Focus Wand. These are all very valuable equipment." Anthony carefully checked the Dark Elven equipment one-by-one. He then frowned tightly.

"Master, did you find something?" Herrera asked.

Anthony nodded and floated the golden sword gradually towards Herrera. He carefully positioned it such that the hilt was right in front of her eyes.

"Look carefully. Do you see the iris flower carved onto the hilt?"

Herrera took the sword into her hands and squinted her eyes. Indeed, she saw an exquisite and secretive marking of an iris flower. There were even miniscule petals surrounding the marking and each petal was engraved with another set of complex magic runes.

"The magic runes on the petals are extremely complex. This marking is almost impossible to forge. It belongs to the Norigan Familia, one of the three big Silver Moon Families. The dagger and the staff were all engraved with the same marking. These weapons are extremely well-made, probably produced for the core members of the Norigan Familia."

Anthony then waved his hand and the golden sword floated back towards him. He held the blade of the sword with his two fingers and the hilt with his other hand and did a snapping movement. His hands suddenly glowed with a blinding light and the sword

was broken cleanly into two parts the next instant. It was as though he was breaking a loaf of bread.

The fractured surface of the sword was still smooth, showing no signs of violent and deliberate destruction.

Anthony wore the reading glasses hanging on his chest and squinted his eyes, carefully observing the fractured surface. After half a minute, he nodded and did the same with the dagger and staff. He then declared, "The flow of power left certain special traces that could be detected from their weapon. It is often possible to tell the strength of the wielder simply through observation of their weapon. I can determine that the owner of these weapons were all Level-5 professionals."

"Level-5? Three of them? How did Link achieve victory?" Herrera was shocked. Link merely told her that there were three Dark Elves who were slightly powerful. However, she had never expected them to be this strong!

She had once fought alongside Link and knew his strength first hand, especially his insane spellcasting speed. He once destroyed a huge group of undead Warriors that could easily overwhelm any professional Magician. However, those undead Warriors were merely Level-1 to Level-2 in strength. This time, he was confronted by three Level-5 professionals of different classes. If she was the one in that predicament, she would be lucky enough to make it back alive. How did Link return to the academy as though nothing serious had happened?

Anthony smiled and continued, "You have underestimated him. Look at this sword. The outer layer of the sword shows traces of melted metal. This would at least take the power of a Level-5 fire elemental spell to achieve."

"Master, are you saying that Link has already mastered a level-5 spell?" Herrera was once again startled. Link had just reached Level-4 a month ago. To think that he had learned a Level-5 spell in just a month.

Anthony kept silent and put down the weapons. He then turned his attention to the dimensional bracelet and quickly found the iris flower marking on it. He then opened the bracelet and saw a magic book in it.

The book was titled Fusion Techniques of Dark Elementals. He then smiled. "This crafty boy took away all the valuable stuff and deliberately left the dark magic book

inside to show his innocence. How cunning."

Anthony then concentrated the fire elements in the air and engulfed the magic book in flames, instantly burning it to ashes.

He then told Herrera, "Link has undoubtedly become a Level-5 Magician. He has at least mastered a Level-5 spell and has the capabilities to stand up to three Level-5 professionals from the Norigan Familia. This can only mean that Link has an extraordinary understanding of magic."

Anthony's mind was on the northern battlefield as he said those words.

More than half of the Magicians should have already reached the battlefield. The incident at Jade Street seemed to have thoroughly enraged the king and catalyzed the attack against the Dark Forest. The Magicians of the academy had also participated in the attack.

In the most recent battle, three Level-2 Magicians from the kingdom were engaged in a battle with one Level-3 Dark Elf Magician. It was reported that the Dark Elf Magician managed to escape with heavy injuries despite being outnumbered, killing one Magician and heavily injuring another in the process. The injured Magician also seemed to be in trauma, and would not be able to battle for the next month.

This was almost too embarrassing.

In comparison, Link was so much more valuable.

Anthony could not help but exclaim, "The Kingdom has been too peaceful. The younger generation simply does not have enough battle power. The academy's goal is to develop Magicians who are both wise and powerful. However, the truth is that very few people are interested in the latter, many of whom do not even know how to apply the knowledge they have learned. The gap between us and the Dark Elves is widening."

Herrera then reminded him, "Master, Link also mentioned something about the demon, Tarviss. Didn't he get banished a long time ago?"

This jolted Anthony out of his thoughts. He nodded, "The truth is that he didn't. He was way too strong and Bryant did not have the power to banish him back to the abyss. He could only choose to seal him away, and the sealing spot is none other than the East Cove Higher Magic Academy."

As the dean, he was well informed about the secrets the academy kept through the generations. The information regarding Tarviss was one of them.

This gave Herrera a shock. She said, "Link mentioned that the Dark Elves were planning to break the seal and destroy the academy. This is the essence of their Black Moon Conspiracy. Master, is this situation very serious?"

Strangely enough, there was not a hint of worry on Anthony's face. He shook his head, "That is not possible. Even I do not know the exact location of the seal. The location had been lost through the generations. If I do not know, there is no way the Dark Elves could know."

"What if they chanced upon it?" Herrera was still worried.

Anthony smiled and shook his head once again. "Even if they got the exact location, they would not be able to break the seal. The power of the seal is extremely strong. The academy has a total of 36 Mage Towers and every single Mage Tower is a part of the seal. Unless the Dark Elves have the capability to destroy half of these Mage Towers, the seal will definitely remain intact."

This would mean that the Dark Elves had to destroy 18 Mage Towers. Every Mage Tower at least had a Level-4 Magician residing within, and the total number of official Magicians in the academy was well above 200.

Furthermore, Dean Anthony's predecessors had been strengthening the defense of the academy every generation. One such example was the massive Level-7 defensive magic formation that could be instantly activated.

This defense was almost unassailable. Even if all the Dark Elf Magicians from the Silver Moon Alliance came, the academy would still be able to hold its ground.

This was the source of Anthony's confidence.

"This Black Moon Conspiracy is purely a plan that the Dark Elves took for granted. There is no need to worry too much about it. What we should focus on now is the war in the North. The king is eager to achieve a victory to offset the negative impact from the Jade Street massacre. The first wave of soldiers has already set off. However, the operation is very hastily planned and executed. I am worried that something might happen."

As one of the strongest Magicians in the Norton Kingdom, Anthony was informed first hand of the situation in the North. There had been a mix of good and bad news amongst the messages that he got. However, he could never feel truly at ease.

He had been keeping this uneasiness within him the past few days. Now that his most precious disciple was here, he took the chance to voice out his discomfort and changed the topic to the war in the North. He was not exactly worried about the Black Moon Conspiracy information that Herrera brought up.

Herrera, on the other hand, was optimistic about the situation in the North. "Master, the situation is not that bad. Our attack this time is also a surprise for the Dark Elves. They should also be unprepared for it."

"I hope that is the case," Anthony sighed.

Anthony then put the fragments of the weapons into the dimensional bracelet and handed it over to Herrera. "Link did well this time. I have already placed the reward in the bracelet. Tell him that while developing his territory is important, he should not delay the progress of his magic research. If not, I will personally request for the king to reclaim the territory!"

"Yes, Master." Herrera took the bracelet and stared inside it curiously. She was immediately at a loss for words.

She had no idea when her master placed the rewards into the bracelet. It was filled to the brim with premium gold ore that could be refined into tens of thousands of gold coins. Apart from money, he also included a huge pile of Mithril ore which would probably become seven pounds of pure Mithril after extraction. All these items were worth at least 30000 gold coins in total.

"Master seems to have a lot of confidence in Link. He is so generous this time." Herrera felt extremely happy for Link. Link should probably have enough money for the development of his land after this.

Herrera was just planning to leave when she stopped in her tracks and said, "There is one more thing I have to tell you. Lady Fortuna Elin met Link just now."

"Oh, how were the results?" Anthony was slightly interested. He had heard many things about her gift in prophecy magic. However, he was not a fan of such magic. He had always thought they were slightly lunatic in nature and not dependable.

"She seemed to have seen something incredible. Her attitude towards Link completely changed." Herrera was incredibly sensitive. She would not be easily fooled by Elin's words.

Anthony laughed loudly and gave a casual comment, "It seems like the young man has gotten himself a new tiny little ally."

Chapter 163

I'll Have to Rely on Myself, Then

"Oh, by the way," said Herrera, "this is your reward from the dean."

Upon returning to the Mage Tower, Herrera took out her storage bracelet and handed Link his reward. Link immediately gasped after catching sight of the reward.

"Why is the dean so generous with me?" asked Link. "He'd just given me a golden ore, and now I get 20,000 gold coins as well?"

By rough estimations, Link discovered that the gold in the ring and all its other components and the fragments of the Dark Elves' weapon would wipe out his funding problems immediately.

"The dean thinks highly of you," said Herrera with a smile. "You mustn't let him down."

"Of course," said Link.

Link had defeated and killed three mighty Dark Elves, plus he'd even brought back the important information about the Black Moon Conspiracy, so Link felt that he had indeed made a great contribution to the academy. Thus, he accepted the rewards and kept them in his storage pendant with good conscience as he knew that he had earned them.

"What did the dean say about the Black Moon Conspiracy and the demon, Tarviss?" asked Link.

"The dean said that the academy's defense is impenetrable," answered Herrera immediately. "Besides, the location of the seal of the demon, Tarviss has long been forgotten, so even though he will keep an eye out for the Dark Elves, there was really no need to be too worried about the Black Moon Conspiracy."

Link's eyebrows creased intensely as he heard Herrera's reply.

The incident of the demon, Tarviss' escape had really happened in the game, so it was

obvious that the Dark Elves knew of his location. Even though things were slightly different now in this world, the Dark Elves' ability to release Tarviss was unquestionable.

The demon's destructive power was unparalleled and not to be trifled with. In the game, even Anthony's powerful spell that he cast by burning parts of his soul had only managed to injure the demon and force it to flee. Now with the information in his hands, he chose to ignore the threat of the Dark Elves' plot and say that the defense of the academy was perfect and impenetrable?

That is just a tad too ridiculous!

Seeing Link's reactions, Herrera felt the need to say something in her mentor's defense.

"The dean is very busy lately," she said. "He's fully preoccupied with the matter of the war going on in the North. He's always in the academy anyway, surely the Dark Elves wouldn't attempt anything too bold as they would be facing him."

Herrera was extremely respectful of the dean. She fully trusted his wisdom and strength, so if he told her that there should be no reason to worry too much about the Dark Elves' secret plot, then that meant that they really didn't pose that much threat. Her own fear and anxiety over the matter had reduced accordingly as well.

Link was a little worried with how relaxed Herrera seemed about the dangerous plot, yet he stopped himself from trying to argue about it with her.

Both Herrera and Anthony were natives of the Firuman continent, so their perspectives were radically different from Link's. Herrera and Anthony had never received any external information other than what they'd seen and heard in their lives, and they'd spent most of their lives in this academy after all, so it was no wonder that they would regard the academy as the safest place in the kingdom. If Link had been in their shoes, he was sure that he would agree with them too. The only reason Link knew any better was because he'd witnessed the catastrophic release of the demon himself in the game.

When he thought of it that way, Link completely gave up his urge to persuade Herrera otherwise. The lines of worry on his face gradually faded as well, and he finally managed to nod at Herrera's remarks.

"If that's how the dean sees it, it must be no problem then," said Link. "Excuse me, tutor, but I've just remembered that there are some things I must go deal with now."

"Go ahead," replied Herrera, relieved that Link didn't try to press the matter of the Dark Elves.

Link then turned around and walked away from Herrera.

Link and Herrera had met in the corridor on the third floor of the Mage Tower, so Link continued walking down the corridor while he mused about the next course of action that he should take.

Tutor and the dean both can't see just how much danger we are in right now, he thought. But how should I convince them? I must find evidence... but where could I find such a thing?

Just as Link was still deep in his thoughts, trouble arose.

Link came to the East Cove Magic Academy often in the game in his previous life, so he used to be very familiar with this place. Even so, the game and reality were different. The real East Cove Magic Academy was many times bigger than the one in the game, not to mention that there were many more minute details here as well. Link hadn't been here for more than a few months, and he spent most of his time studying in the Mage Tower, so he was still quite unfamiliar with the real East Cove Magic Academy at this point.

Not only was the place still quite foreign to him, he hadn't even known many Magicians in the academy as well.

Still, he walked on while thinking about the problem. He walked all the way from the third floor to the first floor, then out of the Mage Tower, walking aimlessly through the academy.

Just take a walk if you feel you're at a dead end about something – that was the habit he developed when was working on his thesis.

Without knowing it, Link had been walking for ten minutes now and he'd reached Bryant's Inspiration Courtyard. Although it was still winter now and the snow still blanketed the ground, the flowers in the courtyard were still in bloom under the influence of a magic seal.

Link walked up to the willow tree where he often discussed magic with Eliard and sat down on a stone bench there. He looked at the leaves wafting in the wind idly for quite some time while he brooded about the problem. Yet, after half a day's time had passed and he made no progress at all. He even started to feel discouraged for the first time.

There are just too many things that I don't know, he thought. Must the academy embark on its old path to destruction? Can it be that it is fate and I can't do anything about it?

Link caught himself mere seconds after the idea arose in his head. He stamped out such a frustrating and fatalist thought out of his head immediately.

I've become hotheaded, he thought. There's no point in brooding about this now, the Black Moon Conspiracy is going to happen on April 15, so I still have nearly three months. Even if I can't find out the exact details of the plan, I can still muster up enough power to fight the demon Tarviss in three months' time, can't I?

Link's eyes lit up the moment this thought occurred to him. It felt as if the clouds had given way to the clear and bright sunlight now.

Yes, I must defeat the darkness with light! Link realized. If the Dark Elves planned to release Tarviss to destroy the academy, then I'll just kill him when his chains are unshackled! If Tarviss was a Level-8 demon, then I must learn spells that are at least Level-8 as well.

Link then had a thought of checking his own status, and in a blink of an eye the gaming system displayed it on the interface.

Link Morani (Hereditary Baron)

Level-5 Elite Magician

Mana Recovery Rate: 110 Points per Hour

Maximum Mana Limit: 1910

Current Weapon: Starcatcher Wand

Current Omni Points: 210 Points

Link then had a thought of checking the list of Level-8 spells. Immediately afterwards the interface displayed rows of bright shining cards of Level-8 spells, of which Link thoroughly examined one by one.

The Glorious Annihilation consumes 4600 Mana Points, the Flaming Sky, 4800 Mana Points, the Frost Dragon requires 4900 Mana Points to summon. Time Cage would consume 4800 Mana Points, the Holy Dragon's Blessings, 1300 Mana Points... But auxiliary spells like some of these are useless against the demon, and they consume so much Mana!

The higher the level of the spells, the greater the difference of Mana consumption between each spell. As a general rule, auxiliary spells would consume far less Mana than attacking spells.

This was so among the Legendary spells as well. Link's Legendary spell Dimensional Jump only consumed 1800 Mana Points, yet any attacking spell of this level would require at least 9000 Mana Points!

The demons were a race of fighters, they had very high resistance to magic attacks and exceptional strength and vitality, not to mention almost indestructible armor. Once Tarviss got released from his chains, he would instantly raze the whole academy to the ground like an invincible war chariot.

For such a strong opponent as Tarviss, the weak attacks of auxiliary spells were basically no threat to him at all. The only way he could be defeated was to attack him instantly with the strongest offensive spell in the arsenal without giving him time to breathe.

But the demon's resistance to magic is extremely high, thought Link. Even if I modify a Level-8 spell with Supreme Magical Skills, I wouldn't be able to strike him down in one move anyway. And Level-8 spells consume so much Mana that I won't be able to increase my maximum Mana limit to accommodate two Level-8 spells in three months... As a matter of fact, I don't think Tarviss would give me any chance to cast two Level-8 spells anyway.

Link then discovered many key details after further consideration. For example, if he wanted to cast two Level-8 spells, he could cast the first one as an ambush attack, then the second one would have to be a direct attack on Tarviss. A Level-8 demon like him would have lightning-fast responses, so if Link wasn't able to cast the second spell

quick enough than he would be dead. Even the Legendary spell Dimensional Jump wouldn't save him then. The only reliable plan, then, was to master a defensive spell able to protect him from spells up to Level-8, which meant that Link must now increase his maximum Mana limit to accommodate three Level-8 spells to be able to fight against the demon Tarviss.

But instead of wasting his Mana on three Level-8 spells, wouldn't it be better for him to master a Level-9 spell?

He then checked the list of Level-9 spells on the interface. But then he almost jumped out of his skin when he took the first glance of the list – Level-9 attacking spells required a minimum of 7000 Mana Points! Not to mention how difficult it would be to try to master a Level-9 spell in three months! Thus, Link began to lose hope in this plan.

The higher the spell level, the more complicated it is, plus there were some other major hurdles as well, and that first hurdle was at Level-6. Typically any Magician who'd managed to surpass the Level-6 barrier would be called a Master Magician.

Why?

Because there was a drastic increase of difficulty in Level-6 spells. Link had seen the spell structure of some Level-6 spells, and he knew that even while he could master the Level-5 Flaming Hand in two days, he wouldn't be able to master these in at least half a month, and even then he would have to forego meals and sleep and devote himself solely to the spell!

There were now six Level-6 Magicians in the East Cove Magic Academy, and Anthony was the only Level-7 Magician here. It had been this way for the past ten years, in fact there were only two Level-7 Magicians in the whole kingdom, with the other one right now stationed in the royal palace.

Meanwhile not even one Level-8 Magician could be found in the whole human world. There was one Level-8 Warrior, but the power of a Warrior was far beneath that of a Magician, so they couldn't be compared at all.

And now Link was hoping to master a Level-9 spell within three months – if he ever let anyone know of this intention of his, they'd surely think he'd gone crazy.

If he used the gaming system to spend 90 of his Omni Points to purchase a Level-9

spell, he'd still be unable to afford the 7000 Mana Points needed for it. Moreover, that spell would only be the regular version without any modification at all. If he used that spell to fight against a peerlessly powerful and almost invincible demon, then he might as well just jump off a cliff because it would give him the same result anyway.

Even mastering a Level-8 spell would be tricky in just three months' time, I couldn't believe that I would master a Level-9 spell in that time myself! Link then smiled cynically and shook his head in near exasperation.

Nevermind, I'll stop worrying about this for now, thought Link. I'll just do what I can and work as hard as possible. Whatever happens, at least I've done my best. Link's face showed a steely determination as he stood up and was about to head back to the Mage Tower. There wasn't much time left, so he must start working now.

But just as he was on his way back to the Mage Tower, Link noticed something he never could've expected.

It was a familiar figure among the willow trees not too far away from where he stood. He blinked and squinted to try to see the figure better and discovered that it was Eliard's lover Elena.

It wouldn't have been such a strange sight to see Elena around the academy, but she was standing in a remote area of the willow grove where most of her body was concealed behind the tree trunks and the shrubs. Had Link not accidentally looked in that direction, he wouldn't have known that she was there.

And what's most perplexing of all was the fact that she wasn't there alone. Right there beside her was a man.

The man was dressed in a luxurious fur coat and seemed to be a man who's well-to-do. He was most probably a merchant from Springs City. He was standing very close to Elena, it was a distance that was too intimate; Link got very suspicious of them now. He took a few steps back and hid behind a willow tree and began to listen in on their conversation.

Because of the distance, Link could only hear the tone of the voice but couldn't make out exactly what they were saying. He didn't dare to use any magic spying device either as he was afraid that they might be able to sense the Mana fluctuations.

Link thought Elena's tone was poles apart from the one he often heard when she was

around Eliard. Her current tone of voice was cold, haughty and even tinged with a slight sense of guilt. It sounded to Link as if it was the voice of a graceful and noble queen. Meanwhile, the merchant's voice was soft and gentle, and despite looking like a successful and wealthy merchant, his voice sounded very submissive and humble when he addressed Elena.

But isn't Elena just the daughter of an average merchant family? Link wondered. Why would that rich merchant treat her as if she's the queen?

Chapter 164

Total Annihilation

Elena was Eliard's lover. This was hardly a secret, especially in Herrera's Mage Tower as they had started cohabitating.

In their daily conversations, Eliard would often commend how gentle and kind Elena was. He would even proudly discuss Elena's outstanding performance at night when he was in the mood. Whenever the topic was on Elena, Eliard had an expression of bliss, as though he had the whole world in his palms.

He had completely become a servant to love.

Even though Link did not have a good impression of Elena, she was, after all, Eliard's beloved partner. He could only stay as far away as possible.

Other than being scheming and materialistic, Link originally thought nothing of Elena. It was not surprising if you thought about her background, as she came from a family of merchants. However, the situation unfolding right in front of him was triggering all the emergency bells in his head.

After talking to the merchant for around ten minutes, Elena suddenly embraced the merchant and kissed him on the lips. The kiss lasted for three seconds before Elena let go of the merchant and walked away nonchalantly. The merchant, on the other hand, stayed in the forest and stared lovingly at Elena's disappearing shadow.

Link had a clear view of the entire scenario from his angle. He immediately frowned, Eliard is definitely unaware of this. However, he will realize it sooner or later, I am afraid...

Thinking back on the look of bliss on Eliard's face, Link was certain that Eliard would be devastated.

"Should I tell Eliard?" Link was having a headache.

Link had no evidence of the incident. If he had told Eliard directly, Elena would likely

deny all accusations and use her charm to trap Eliard in her web of lies. As Eliard was blinded by love, he would definitely believe her side of the story and turn his back on Link.

However, if he chose to ignore and keep it a secret from Eliard. Eliard was sure to be devastated when he realized the truth. Judging from his character, he would probably not harm Elena, but wallow in self-pity and despair alone.

Love is indeed a volatile and luxurious good. If it does not turn out well, it might even destroy a talented Magician, Link could not help but exclaim silently.

After thinking for a moment, Link had decided to first observe Elena and get a deeper understanding of her personality. If he deemed her character to be seriously flawed, he would then find chances to give subtle hints to Eliard.

He then stayed in the forest for another five minutes until both the merchant and Elena were completely out of sight. He then walked back to Herrera's Mage Tower. The moment he opened the door, he saw Eliard and Elena on the first floor.

They were flipping through magic books in the corner. From time to time, Eliard would guide Elena along and answer her queries. Elena would then look at him in adoration, to which Eliard would always give a warm and tender smile in return.

Link even saw Elena wearing a necklace that he had created. As he recalled Eliard's expression that day when he was asking for a favor, Link could not help but sigh.

At that moment, Elena gave a quick peck on Eliard's cheek while he was absorbed in the magic book. Eliard then broke out into a silly smile. That was almost Link's limit and he immediately left the hall while trying to erase those memories from his brain.

For the next few days, Link spent almost all his time on his magic research. When he felt tired, he would delve fanatically into crafting magic equipment. The equipment would then be passed to Warter for sale. Occasionally, Lucy would write to inform him on the progress of the Ferde Wilderness' initial development. Link did not participate physically in the entire process, merely writing back to Lucy and sending back another 5000 gold coins as funding. This was so even when the mercenary band started missions to clear up the bandit's hideout in the area. At the same time, Link had also been observing Elena.

He placed a secretive magic formation at the tower gate. As long as Elena left the Mage

Tower alone, her unique magic fluctuations would activate the magic formation which would then send a signal to Link. If she was leaving with Eliard, the magic formation would stay dormant. Whenever Link received a signal, he would follow behind stealthily.

Time flew and it was two weeks since the first time Link caught Elena in the forest. In this period, Elena left the Mage Tower alone for a total of eight times. The duration was always a standard 30 minutes and her reason of absence was always that she needed some fresh air.

In these eight separate instances, Link saw a different side of Elena.

She would always meet a merchant in secret in the forest. Furthermore, there was more than one merchant that she was seeing! Link had counted a total of six different merchants with prestigious backgrounds. Each of those merchants having a close business relationship with a Master Magician in the academy. However, Elena seemed to be able to keep her multiple intimate relationships a secret from each of her lovers. Every merchant seemed to be bewitched by her charm.

Not only was her private life complicated, but Link was horrified to discover that Elena had many faces. While she was gentle and kind towards Eliard, she could be cold, elegant, seductive or even submissive to the other merchants. She displayed each character naturally and with ease. There were almost no flaws in her facade.

This woman is really something. She definitely has a more complicated background. Her merchant background was simply a farce!

Link was extremely careful every time and kept a distance between Elena and himself. He also did not use any magic, causing him to miss out on the content of their conversation. However, based on what he had observed, he had already developed suspicion towards Elena's true identity.

Link's continued attempts at tracking Elena were no longer an act simply to help his good friend. He felt that Elena was a huge threat, even to the point of suspecting that she was connected to the Black Moon Conspiracy. This was due to her multiple secret intimate relationships which seemed to point to something more sinister.

Link then used a Supreme Magic Skill he had recently grasped to set up an extremely well-hidden magic formation to eavesdrop on the conversation.

This magic formation came in handy soon after. One day, as Link was just preparing to test out his new ideas in the elemental pool, the alarm from the tower entrance rang again. Elena had left the Mage Tower on her own.

Link immediately ran out of the elemental pool and left the Mage Tower after three minutes.

Link hastened his pace the moment he left the Mage Tower, taking the shortcut towards the Inspiration Courtyard before finally reaching the forest Elena always held her secret conversations in. He made a detour and entered the forest through another entrance before squatting down in a good hiding spot.

After three minutes, Elena had arrived. There was already a merchant awaiting her arrival. This merchant was none other than the one Link saw two weeks ago.

The moment their gazes met, Elena and the merchant embraced each other and kissed with great passion. This lasted a whole two minutes. All the sounds Link got from his eavesdropping magic formation were panting and slurping sounds. He felt unusually irritated by it.

It felt like an eternity before the two of them finally got their hands off each other. Elena's voice could then be heard. She spoke in a cold voice, "My knight, what good news have you brought me this time?"

"My dear queen, you will definitely be satisfied. I have successfully bribed a Level-4 Magician from Ferdinand's Mage Tower. Look what he gave me."

Link stole a glance and saw the merchant handing a scroll over to Elena.

Elena opened the scroll and looked satisfied. She smiled seductively and said, "Very well my knight. The master will definitely reward you. I will reward you as well."

The merchant then spoke hastily, "Oh, my queen, thank you so much. May I know when I can redeem your gift?"

After a few seconds, Elena spoke, "Not here. How about this. I will be going to River Cove Town to settle some things tomorrow. You can wait for me in the hotel."

"Thank you so much, my queen." The merchant sounded as though he was going insane.

Both of them then carried on with their disgusting conversation. The merchant praised Elena continuously while Elena carried herself like a queen, belittling the merchant yet enticing him with seductive words.

Link ignored these superfluous things. His attention was captured by Elena's second sentence—"master"? That sounds like a term used by followers of a dark cult. Could Elena be a spy from a cult?

Link's eyes widened upon the realization. I cannot let this Elena accomplish what she wants. It sounds like she will be headed to River Cove Town tomorrow. That would be perfect!

Link had to take action.

As for Eliard...Link looked at the memory crystal he had activated to record the entire scene. He sighed regrettably. It is better to end some things quickly even though they might be painful. Let's just hope Eliard can recover.

At that moment, Elena bade goodbye to the merchant and they once again got drunk in each other's passionate embrace.

As he had gotten Elena's subtle permission, the merchant was extremely daring. He slid his hands into Elena's skirt without any resistance. This lasted for five entire minutes before they reluctantly separated from each other. Elena then tidied up her hair before leaving the forest. The merchant then walked the other way with a dazed expression.

Link did not return to the Mage Tower immediately. He waited patiently in the forest before following behind the merchant.

Elena was Eliard's official partner and was a member of the academy. She would not be able to go too far without the academy's permission. However, this merchant was a free individual not bounded by the academy's rules and was just about to leave the academy. Link thus decided to start his investigation from this merchant.

The merchant continued walking towards the stable where he parked his carriage. Taking advantage of his ignorance of magic, Link cast a Level-0 magic marking on the merchant and exited the academy ahead of him. After he was out of the sight from Guardsman Vincent, Link then hid in the forest beside the pathway in wait for the merchant.

Around ten minutes later, a carriage bearing the magic fluctuations of Link's magic marking arrived at the entrance.

This place is still too close to the academy. It's not a good time. Link waited for the carriage to drive past him before casting a Cat's Agility spell on himself and followed closely behind.

After around ten minutes, Link felt comfortable with the distance and was prepared to strike.

At that moment, a strange thing happened. A group of bandits suddenly rushed out from the forest and killed the coachman. They then attempted to break open the carriage door violently. From their bloodthirsty expression, it seemed like their target was the merchant.

"Are they trying to...silence him?" Link was appalled. The issue was way more complicated than he had ever imagined.

Chapter 165

A Woman Who Put Fear into Link's Heart

The scene took place just 200 feet away from Link. He quickly made a decision.

That merchant mustn't die, neither can I let those robbers die. I have some questions to ask them!

By that time, the robbers had pulled open the carriage door.

"Is it gold coins that you want?" shouted the horrified merchant in panic. "I can give you however much you want! 100 gold coins? 200? A thousand?"

"Stop wasting your time," the robber sneered. "Once you're dead, all your money will be ours!" Then the robber stabbed a dagger right at the merchant's heart.

Surprisingly, to both the robber and the merchant, the dagger hadn't touched the merchant's skin but was stopped by a white shining shield that appeared out of thin air. The robber could feel a strong deflective force coming from the dagger. Now, not only was he unable to stab the dagger through the shield, he even had difficulties in holding on to the dagger's hilt.

Clang!

The dagger was suddenly pushed out of the robber's hand and flung far away by an inexplicable force. Even the robber himself lost his balance and fell off from the carriage.

"What's going on? What's going on!" the robber screamed in shock and terror. He simply couldn't wrap his head around what just happened.

The next moment, he saw a dozen white lines in the air, followed by a series of small explosions. Then all he could hear was the sound of his brothers screaming in pain. When he turned around, he discovered that all his brothers who had been with him had fallen to the ground. He didn't know if they were dead or alive, but this was just too horrifying!

The sight before him had made the robber's blood run cold. All he could do was stand there with his jaw dropped so low that one could fit a duck's egg into his mouth! Then, he saw a young man wearing an ink-blue robe walk towards him. This man was shrouded in a faint white aura, and he looked so mystifying that the robber was wakened from his stupor.

"Please spare me, Master Magician!" he pleaded. "I won't do anything to cross you again! Please spare me!"

Link was disgusted at the sight of this robber who had an ugly wolf tattoo on his cheek. Within a few seconds he'd thrown all his dignity away and begged for mercy to save his own hide. Link had no sympathy for a man like that.

"Get up!" said Link. "Carry all your men into the woods. If you attempt to run away from me, then you'll get a real taste of my magic power!"

As he spoke, Link unleashed a Whistle onto a big boulder beside the road. The boulder was a brown mudstone of about three cubic feet in size, so it wasn't a particularly hard material. The moment Link cast the Whistle, it shot through the air with a high-pitched screech and hit right in the middle of the boulder.

Bang!

The boulder was now reduced to crumbling fragments of rocks that were sent flying through the air. The robber was just an ordinary Level-1 Warrior, so he wasn't at all accustomed to this level of power. He gulped continuously as he watched the big boulder get reduced to clumps of clay. His face was getting green with fear now and all the thoughts he had of running for his life were extinguished. He then began to obediently carry the bodies of his brothers into the forest one at a time.

Meanwhile, Link walked up to the carriage and looked inside. He discovered the merchant sitting there shaking like a leaf. There was also an unpleasant smell inside the carriage – the merchant had pissed himself in fear. Link frowned deeply in repulsion at the offensive stench.

"Get up!" Link scowled at the merchant. "Drive your carriage into the forest right there."

They weren't that far away from the academy gates, so parking it on the roadside here would make it too conspicuous and that might attract unwanted attention.

The merchant didn't dare to defy Link's orders, so he clumsily climbed into the coachman's seat and tried to drive the carriage. It was obvious that he'd never done it before, but after a struggling for a few minutes, he finally got the carriage moving. Meanwhile, Link helped maintained the horses' movement by casting a few Fireballs near them to scare them and force them to move forward. In the end they managed to get the carriage into the forest after much effort.

The three of them then walked out onto a small path in the forest. Link stood leaning against a big tree trunk and slowly poured his Mana into the Memory Crystal that he'd always been carrying around lately. This Memory Crystal would record everything that happened here – all the voices and images as well. This would later be useful as an important piece of evidence when Link decided to expose Elena's covert actions.

"Tell me," Link barked at the robber, "who ordered you to kill the merchant?"

"No...no one," the robber answered, waving his hands in denial, "I just wanted to rob his money..."

"Do you take me for a fool?" Link's wand then lit up and a Glass Orb flew out of its tip and headed towards the robber's head. It stopped abruptly a mere couple inches in front of the robber's face. Then, Link gradually loosened his control over the fire elements in the Glass Orb, transforming it from a dimly glowing orb to a gradually brighter fireball. Even the air around it started to roil up from the intense heat and the robber's hair was beginning to singe as well.

The robber was now so scared that he stood there rooted to the ground; large beads of cold sweat streamed down his forehead and he kept gulping in fear while his eyes still darted around uncertainly. Yes, he was afraid of Link, but this fear was still not enough to make him spill the identity of the person behind this.

"Don't try my patience!" warned Link. He once again let loose his control over the fire elements in the Glass Orb. With a frightening whoosh, the Glass Orb's surface turned into flames. The robber's face was burned by the fire which made him recoil instinctively.

"I don't know who she was," he suddenly spilled out, no longer daring to be silent, "but she ordered us to wait by the road for a carriage to pass by. If that carriage made this stone glow, then she ordered us to kill everyone inside it." As he spoke, the robber slipped out a thumb-sized stone from his pocket with lines of runes on its surface. It

was undoubtedly a magic rune stone.

Link noticed that the robber used the word "she", so the person behind this must be a woman—it was most likely Elena.

He didn't touch the rune stone, but instead just examined the runes on its surface from afar. After a while, a notification about the rune stone appeared on the interface.

Green Rune Stone (Auxiliary)

Quality: Fine

Level-3

First Effect: When a specific magic indicator appears within 300 feet of the rune stone, it will be activated and emit a light.

Second Effect: Detects all Mana fluctuations that appear within 300 feet of the rune stone and converts this information into a simple signal that will be sent to the main rune stone within a range of three miles.

'A specific magic indicator'? Link wondered. His eyebrows furrowed at the thought, then he turned towards the terrified merchant beside him and cast a Level-2 detection spell on him.

A light spot appeared with a trailing light behind it. This spot of light then flew over to the top of the merchant's head and its trailing light turned into a sheet of light that then curled into a halo-like ring over the merchant's head. Then the halo shone a light down the merchant's body, surrounding him with a thin blanket of light.

Soon, glowing white runes appeared on the merchant's chest, proving that someone had stamped a magic indicator there. There was another spot on his back where a patch of small gray runes appeared.

Link then focused his Mana and directed it to the gray runes to destroy it. Once that was done, the rune stone in the robber's hand immediately stopped glowing. That proved that this patch of gray runes was the signal for the robbers to attack him. But who would attach this to the merchant's body?

Link thought it must be no one else but Elena. She was the only one who had been

intimately close to the merchant in the willow grove in the academy, so she had plenty of opportunities to stick this magic indicator onto the merchant's back. Now that he was sure of this point, Link began to see the big picture.

Now that Elena had gotten her hands on the scroll that Link assumed contained important information, she'd completed her aims and had no more use for the merchant. She had promised the merchant an ultimate prize, which the merchant assumed to be a night of carnal bliss with Elena, but in fact, what Elena meant was that she would kill him off because he was useless to her now.

As for these robbers, they must've been the people that she had hired earlier to do the dirty work for her. This way, it was impossible to link the merchant's death back to Elena. Even if Link had figured out her plans, he still didn't have any solid evidence that would prove her guilt beyond any doubt.

What was even more frightening was the fact that Elena had taken every precaution so meticulously. Not only did the rune stone serve the purpose of making sure that the robbers got the right person, it also served as a warning signal in case her plans might be found out as well. Link knew that by now Elena was already aware that her plans had gone awry. She must be thinking of a way to save herself by now. Moreover, this would give her time to destroy any evidence that might incriminate her.

Link also believed that even if he returned swiftly to the academy right now and present the Memory Crystal as an evidence, all he would achieve was to put himself into trouble. It might even prevent him from learning her real motives forever.

No one can say she's not thorough! Link thought.

All these things, Link understood in a matter of seconds. He then cast a Glass Orb and knocked the robber out with it. Then he turned to the merchant who'd pissed himself once again.

"That Elena woman that you're so charmed with is a poisonous snake," said Link. "She's the one who hired these robbers to kill you. If you still want to live, go back to the academy with me and expose her crimes!"

Although he didn't have enough material evidence against Elena right now, Link could easily prove her guilt if this merchant would cooperate and expose what she had done.

To Link's surprise, though, the merchant responded to him with a shake of his head

and a sorrowful expression on his face.

"No, I can't do that," he said. "She is my queen. If she wanted my life, then I'll give it to her."

As he spoke, the merchant who had been so timid up till now suddenly drew a dagger out of nowhere and was about to stab it at his own heart.

"Farewell, my love!" the merchant shouted.

Link couldn't just let the man die right in front of him, so he quickly used the Magician's Hand to grab the dagger just in time before it struck the merchant's heart.

"Don't be stupid!" Link shouted. "She just used you like a dog! Why would you want to throw your life away for her?" Link just couldn't understand what this man was thinking. He wondered if Elena had used a dark magic spell on him, but strangely enough he couldn't detect any trace of dark magic aura from his body at all.

"I'd be the happiest man if my queen thinks of me as her dog," said the merchant wistfully. "Ah...I know she loves me, but she's a holy maiden, so she can't be with me. She must've wanted me dead because she didn't have the heart to reject me in person..."

"..." Link was speechless for a while when he heard the man's lament. He thought this man might have some kind of a brain damage. Nonetheless, his attention was caught by a couple of words the merchant had used to describe Elena.

"Holy maiden? What do you mean by holy maiden?" Link asked.

"Stop trying, Mr. Magician," said the merchant as he turned around to face Link and gave him a wry smile. "I will never betray my queen."

After finishing his sentence, the merchant went on to slam his head against the metal part of the carriage in an attempt of suicide.

The first suicide attempt might have been an impulsive action, but to try it for a second time meant that this man really wished to die, so it would be pointless to stop him now. The merchant had really lost his head to Elena, so much so that he would actually commit suicide when he found out that Elena wanted him dead.

What a pathetic man! And what a terrifying control Elena had on this man's heart!

Link didn't bother to stop the merchant as he tried to kill himself again. He used a lot of force this time and soon enough Link could hear a splat! It was the sound of the merchant's head being smashed. His lifeless body fell limply to the ground – he was dead.

Link stared at the dead body with fear and apprehension. It wasn't the sight of a fresh corpse that disturbed him so much, he was just scared for Eliard.

How far had Elena's charm worked on Eliard? If this is the degree at which a man could be controlled by her, what would happen to Eliard if something happened to Elena?

Link didn't dare to imagine the possibilities of what could happen then.

Chapter 166

Elena's Countermeasure

East Cove Higher Magic Academy.

While Link was rescuing the merchant, Elena was reading a book silently in the hall. She was alone as Eliard was in the elemental pool experimenting on a Level-2 spell he newly learned. He was extremely busy these days.

When magic fluctuations could be felt from the luminous green rune stone, Elena was shocked and her face immediately sunk.

"Have I been exposed?"

She held the rune stone tightly in her hand. The rune stone was originally cold to the touch. However, due to the constant information and vibrations from the magic fluctuations, it had started to become warmer.

When she covered the stone with her hands, she could prevent the magic fluctuations from being felt by anyone else. She could also determine the type of spell used from the special way the rune stone would react to different spells.

The current fluctuation pointed to the presence of explosive spells around the other rune stone. Whenever a spell was cast, there would be a sharp increase in magic fluctuations, allowing Elena to accurately determine the strength and frequency of the attacks.

At the start, Elena felt two extremely strong magic fluctuations back-to-back. Her heart almost skipped a beat. "This is a Level-4 spell! This Magician cast two Level-4 spells in less than two seconds! What fast spellcasting speed! Are two Magicians fighting against each other?"

In fact, it was Link who had consecutively cast the Level-4 defensive spell, Edelweiss, twice.

Following which, the rune stone emanated a series of weak but extremely fast

fluctuations. There were a total of 12 fluctuations in less than half a second. Elena was horrified. "This is the strength of a Level-1 spell. Who could have cast 12 spells in half a second? Could it be...?"

There was only one Magician in the entire academy who could cast Level-0 spells at such a frequency. That person was Link, the Magician staying in the same Mage Tower whom she had avoided the entire time.

She then felt another few instances of Level-1 and Level-0 spells. This carried on for around ten minutes before the rune became dormant.

Elena's heart sank.

"It could only be him. No one else could cast two Level-4 spells in less than two seconds. Hasn't he been in the Mage Tower all this while? How could he possibly find out?"

Elena was confused. She had already taken precautions to avoid him. To think that she would still be busted by him. However, she knew that she had no time to worry about the details. She had to think of a countermeasure before Link returned to the Mage Tower. Elena stayed calm and immediately weighed her options. From the day she entered the academy, she had been preparing for this day in case she ever got exposed.

She stood up and put away the magic books she was reading.

The apprentice beside her was puzzled and asked, "Elena, we still have a lot of time left. Why did you stop?"

"I am feeling slightly unwell and wish to rest." Elena gave a slight smile and spoke in a gentle voice. She even tried to sound weak and managed to make herself look pale.

The apprentice was completely fooled and immediately nodded, "Please rest. After all, health is the most important."

"Thank you." She then proceeded to the second floor and greeted a few other apprentices on the way. When she reached her room, she immediately entered the room and closed the door behind her.

The room was large by normal standards. It was made up of a common space and two bedrooms, as she was cohabitating with Eliard. She immediately peeled off her facade

and her expression of pain and weakness changed into one that was cold and unmoving. She entered her bedroom and took a thick magic book from the top layer of her bookshelf, where she hid three separate scrolls in the cover compartment.

These three scrolls contained detailed blueprints of the internal structure of the six most powerful Mage Towers in the academy. The information included the Detection spells, Defensive spells, and Offensive spells used by the tower and the workings of their respective elemental pools.

If one were to plan their attack based on the information recorded, their ambush would be a lot more efficient. Furthermore, if they could point out the weakness of the Mage Tower from the blueprint, they could take down the Mage Tower in one hit!

There were six Master Magicians in the academy, and their respective Mage Towers would be the pivotal buildings holding the fort in the case of an attack. If the Dark Elves were to destroy them, the academy's defensive strength would be reduced by at least thirty percent!

The blueprint of Bale's Mage Tower had already been taken care of. Elena was simply tasked with bringing back the blueprints of the other five central Mage Towers. She had carried out her task efficiently, already securing three of them. She did not expect to be exposed at this crucial juncture when victory was already in sight.

These scrolls should have been sent out a long time ago. However, after the incident in Gladstone City, the Norton Kingdom started their ruthless extermination of the Dark Elves as well as anyone who had pledged allegiance to the Dark Brotherhood and the Syndicate. This destroyed all her connections outside of the academy and left her alone on this highly dangerous mission. She could only keep these scrolls in a safe place until she received new instructions.

However, her life was at stake now.

"I have to send the blueprints out, but how? Link is rushing back right now, I don't have much time." Elena's heart was pounding as she pranced around the room. Her brain was working at top speed, thinking of a way to escape the academy safely.

After a while, she was suddenly struck with an idea, "That's it!"

It would be difficult for her to deliver the blueprints herself, but she could use Eliard's help! Eliard was Link's best friend. If she left the academy together with Eliard, Link

would have to think twice before attacking her as Eliard's safety would be compromised. Furthermore, she could also use Eliard as a hostage when the time came.

Elena then formulated a detailed plan before she put away the scrolls into her robe. She then left her room and headed towards the elemental pool on the second floor.

She should not be disturbing Eliard as he was experimenting with his new spell. However, time was short. Elena pinched her thighs with full force and a sharp pain shot through her body, causing her eyes to be full of tears.

She then activated the runes on the door. When the runes lit up, she feebly said, "Eliard, can you come out for a moment?"

Within ten seconds, the door to the elemental pool opened. Eliard walked out with wet hair and ice residue on his hands. There were also many tears in his magic robe. He looked completely disheveled.

He must have forcefully interrupted his experiment at the most crucial moment.

Elena felt a tinge of guilt upon seeing Eliard's pale face, but suppressed her emotions almost immediately.

Eliard on the other hand, didn't think much about the incident. The moment he saw the pained expression on his lover's face, he gently asked, "Elena, what happened?"

Elena clutched her abdomen with her hands and beads of cold sweat could be seen on her forehead. She spoke with a pale face, "My stomach hurts and I have no idea why. The recovery potions didn't help as well..."

"How did this happen! I'll take you to the church in River Cove Town now!" Eliard scooped Elena off her feet and briskly walked towards the Mage Tower entrance.

Magic could accomplish almost anything in the World of Firuman. However, healing was something that magic had limitations in. Priests were the only ones who could cure serious injuries or illnesses. Hence, a Magician would still have to consult a priest if they fell sick.

As the East Cove Higher Magic Academy did not have priests, they would have to go to River Cove Town, which was exactly what Elena wanted.

Eliard ran all the way to the stables with Elena in his hands. By the time he reached, he was already sweating and panting.

Eliard immediately paid the coachman a whopping ten gold coins and shouted, "To River Cove Town, double up!"

With the monetary incentive, the coachman's actions were also unusually swift. He led the horses out of the stable, hooked them onto the carriage and with a resounding whip, the carriage sped out of the academy.

In the carriage, Eliard held Elena's hand with one hand while gently rubbing her stomach with another. He whispered, "Why did this happen. Was it because of last night...?"

"Don't say that." Elena's pale cheeks suddenly flushed with a tinge of shyness.

Eliard felt extremely guilty and reprimanded himself in his heart. His expression also grew gentler by the minute. At that moment, he felt that this woman meant more to him than the world, even more than magic, which he loved so dearly.

He could not explain the phenomenon as well.

In the beginning, Eliard did not feel much affection for Elena, merely noticing that she was an understanding and kind girl. However, as they spent more time with one another, he gradually grew accustomed to her companionship. He then started developing feelings for Elena. There were times when he would feel jealous when he saw her chatting and joking with other male apprentices.

When she inadvertently showed her seductive expressions, there would be a huge desire to make her his own. He still remembered the feelings of bliss when they shared their first kiss. He also remembered the ecstasy he felt when they were connected for the first time.

Now, he was already inseparable from her. If she was met with an unfortunate accident someday, Eliard had no idea how he was going to take it.

The carriage quickly sped through the gate and onto the King's Lane.

The East Cove Higher Magic Academy's carriages had four windows, each of them made from clear crystals. One would have a clear view of their surroundings even

when sitting in the carriage.

Less than half a minute later, Elena saw a familiar figure riding towards the carriage on a Wind Fenrir.

The figure seemed to have noticed the magic aura in the carriage as well. He gradually slowed down his speed and turned his Wind Fenrir sideways to block the entire King's Lane, preventing the carriage from moving any further.

The coachman was horrified and immediately stopped the carriage.

Elena then narrowed her eyes ever so slightly. She knew that this was the most crucial moment.

Chapter 167

Was It True? Or Was It All a Lie?

On King's Lane.

Link saw through the transparent crystal window of the carriage that it was Eliard and Elena inside. Link sighed quietly. He knew that Elena would be using this trick on him.

Eliard was Link's best friend. Elena must've known that Link would never do anything to put Eliard in harm's way. Link was secretly impressed at how cunning Elena had been by using Eliard as a hostage.

By then, Eliard had also noticed Link as well; he was not aware of the real situation yet and was curious about Link's actions.

"Link," he called out as he opened the carriage window, "what are you doing here?"

Link's eyes never left Elena. At that time, she was leaning closely against Eliard's chest and her face looked very pale—she seemed to be in pain, but Link knew that it was just a ruse. He noticed that Elena had rested her hand on Eliard's heart all this time, never moving it away even for just an inch.

She was wearing a magic bracelet on that hand. If Link wasn't mistaken, the bracelet should be the one that contained a Level-1 Whistle. There were some rough and clunky parts on the bracelet that confirmed Link's suspicion that it was Eliard's own handiwork.

Link was sure that if he ever made any moves that would threaten Elena's safety, she would immediately release that Whistle straight at Eliard's heart, killing him in an instant. Link feared he might not be able to stop Elena in time if she did that since the magic bracelet was so close to Eliard.

This time, it seemed Eliard really was in trouble. Link mustn't make any rash movements.

"Get out of the way, Link," said Eliard. "Elena's really unwell, I must take her to the

priest immediately!" Eliard could feel Elena's body shivering in his arms. He thought she must really be suffering in pain right now.

Link let out a long sigh and shook his head gently. He then pointed his wand at Elena.

"Eliard," he said, "she must not be allowed to leave the East Cove Magic Academy!"

"What are you talking about?" said Eliard, completely flummoxed. "What is going on here, Link?" He was getting more and more worried about Elena's illness and wanted to get help for her as fast as possible, yet Link was here blocking the way. At that moment, even though Link had always been his best friend, anger was beginning to brew in Eliard's heart.

Link squinted his eyes to focus on Elena's every movement. Then, without moving his gaze away from her, he took out the Memory Crystal from his pocket.

As Link's Mana slowly flowed into it, the amber-like yellow crystal began to glow faintly. Then a play of light and shadow appeared in the air near the crystal, showing Elena's amorous rendezvous with the dead merchant in the willow grove.

The crystal in Link's hand was of high quality, plus Link's own control of his Mana was unparalleled. These factors combined to make the scene displayed so incredibly clear and life-like that they were no different from a hologram.

Link didn't show the entire scene that went on in the willow grove as he wanted to protect Eliard's feelings. All he showed were several seconds of them kissing and that was it. He knew that even that was more than enough.

After just a glance of the scene Eliard seemed as if he was hit by a ton of bricks. He just sat there completely struck dumb!

Elena really didn't expect that Link would use this trick. The originally pale face of hers now got deathly pale where not even a tinge of color was on her face anymore. Eliard, in contrast, had gone red in the face. Even his eyes seemed to be bloodshot now. Elena could clearly feel Eliard's hands shaking now.

This Link really is something, Elena sighed. He's left me no room to defend myself at all. I'm afraid I won't be leaving here alive.

After a while, another scene emerged from the Memory Crystal. It was the scene when

the merchant committed suicide on the King's Lane.

"Elena is not the innocent girl you think she is, Eliard," said Link after the scene ended. He then put the crystal back inside his pocket. "It's likely that she might be involved in some evil cult as a holy maiden and was plotting something that would undermine the security of the East Cove Magic Academy. Therefore, she must not be allowed to leave here before everything is investigated!"

Link had noticed Eliard's appearance by now and he felt very sorry for him, but there was no other choice. This must be done. Eliard seemed to have heard Link's words, but he hadn't made any response just yet.

"Elena," he finally whispered to her in a desperate voice, "please tell me this isn't true."

Elena didn't dare to look straight into Eliard's eyes. The scenes from the Memory Crystal was so clear that there was no way she could get away with accusing them as forged and untrue. And so, all Elena could do was look down. Her lips shook slightly as if she wanted to say something, yet they both stayed that way for a while and no one said anything.

Eliard had been the perfect gentleman with her. Even though she couldn't feel the same way that he felt for her, she still couldn't find any flaws in him to attack him with. And so, she stayed silent.

"You're not ill at all, are you?" asked Eliard. He wasn't an idiot. As a matter of fact, he had a mind so brilliant that he was almost unparalleled, so everything was quickly clear to him now after what Link had shown him. "Elena, you faked your illness to trick me into bringing you away from East Cove Academy, didn't you?"

His eyes swept over Elena's delicate face. It was the face that had once given him bliss and joy, yet all he felt now was fear and even a hint of hatred.

In the end, his eyes fell on the hand that clutched on his chest. Those fingers were so slender and delicate, the skin so fair and smooth, and her arms were so round and soft. Her hands were so beautiful that he had held them lightly in his own hands and admired them endlessly many a night.

Yet now, Eliard's gaze was only fixed on the magic bracelet on her wrist. It was a gift from him that he made for her himself.

"Now that Link has found out about you, are you going to threaten him with my life?" Eliard's eyes were now becoming cold and emotionless. All the warmth he felt for her was gone now. How could there be such a cruel and heartless woman in this world?

Finally, Elena discarded all her pretenses and smirked at Eliard. She raised her head haughtily and the tenderness in her eyes had now completely disappeared and was replaced with cold ruthlessness.

"Eliard, you simple fool," mocked Elena, still clinging to Eliard's heart. "I've been pulling the wool over your eyes all this time and you've always been happily following me around. Let me tell you, that bastard in the scene wasn't the only one, I actually have four other lovers as well!"

Eliard's face was now turning purple. He gritted his teeth in anger, but because he was naturally mild-tempered he still couldn't find any vicious words to attack Elena with.

"Why?" That was the only word Eliard finally managed to utter after being stunned for a long time.

"There is no reason. I just like to play with you. I think you look stupid!" Elena's words became even more vicious.

After saying that, instead of looking straight into Eliard's eyes, she turned to Link and laughed in his face.

"You are better than I expected," she said. "I don't mind getting caught by such a mighty talent like you. But let me be clear, I have no intention of going back to the academy. If you want to bring me back, then you'll have to bring back two dead bodies – one is mine, and the other is Eliard's!"

"A single magic bracelet is no threat to me," said Link, narrowing his piercing eyes at Elena with a gradually boiling temper.

"Haha! Did you think that I would kill him with this pathetic bracelet?" jeered Elena. "I've slept with this idiot so many times that I've fixed so many things into his body now. I'll be honest with you, I'm not much of a Magician, and my skills in magic spells aren't all that impressive. But divine spells, especially dark divine spells, are just my forte! I could easily put someone as unguarded as this idiot easily under my control. Remember this, if I die, then the divine spells in Eliard's body will explode as well!"

Link was shocked and suddenly caught up in a dilemma. The merchant had called her a holy maiden after all, so it should be natural that she would have knowledge of some powerful divine spells. Link took her threats seriously and knew that he mustn't make any moves that might cause harm to Eliard.

But can he let this woman go? Obviously not!

And so, for a time, the two sunk into silence with either side not willing or able to make any move.

Then suddenly the usually silent Eliard exploded in anger.

"Did you think that I would be afraid of death, Elena?" he roared. "Then you're sorely mistaken!" He then swiftly began to cast the spell, Whistle right as he spoke, completely undeterred by the possibility that Elena might counterattack. He was ready to fight till the death, and he must kill this wicked woman with his own hands!

Elena immediately began to fight back by directing her Mana into the magic bracelet. Because she relied on magic gear to cast the spell, she would complete much faster than Eliard. In this case, she would be able to unleash a Whistle within 0.1 seconds—at this speed, there was no way that Eliard would have enough time to defend himself. The only one who could respond in such a brief moment would be Link.

Link focused his gaze and entered instantly into the calm state of spellcasting. The world in his eyes now seemed to move very slowly. With the wand in his hand pointing at Elena, he directed his Mana into it and instantaneously set forth a translucent ball of light that immediately hit the bracelet on Elena's hand.

"Silent Disarray!" uttered Link under his breath.

Silent Disarray

Level-2 Spell

Mana Consumption: 60 points.

Effects: Disrupts the spell structure of spells at Level-2 and below to impede the target's spellcasting.

(Note: This special magical structure requires precise control of Mana. Spellcaster

must be of Level-5 or higher in order to master this spell.)

This was a spell that Link had just mastered recently, so he could cast it almost instantaneously. When Link's Silent Disarray was completed, Elena's Whistle was only half-formed, and so Link's spell managed to make the spell structure of Elena's Whistle collapse and thus, the spell disintegrated.

That didn't deter Elena though. When her Whistle failed, she suddenly slipped out a dagger with her other hand at the speed of a lightning bolt and was about to fling it towards Eliard's heart.

It was obvious that this woman had gone through the training of an Assassin's combative skills. She had slipped out the dagger with such acuity and speed, plus the dagger's material had anti-magic properties so low-level spells would be useless against it. High-level spells, on the other hand, would take too much time to cast.

Link weighed his options for a moment and soon discovered that the only way to stop the blade in time was to stun Elena.

Link had always been decisive and he was even more so now. So, within the blink of an eye, Link waved his wand and unleashed a Glass Orb that headed straight to Elena's hand that was holding the dagger. The blow's aim was to attack Elena's arm so that the threat of the dagger could be diminished.

Link used his high-speed spellcasting skills here and he used the Glass Orb spell which he was very familiar with. Moreover, he'd also borrowed the strength of the Domingo crystal by using the elements stored inside it, so Link only spent 0.01 seconds to cast the second Glass Orb.

The Glass Orb shot through the air and exploded near Elena's ear. It was Link's plan to knock Elena out with the shockwave of the explosion. While it was true that he mustn't kill her because of the threat of the dark divine spells inside Eliard's body, but there was no reason why he couldn't make her unconscious!

Bang! Bang!

Those were the explosions of two Glass Orbs that were unleashed almost simultaneously. The hand that held the dagger was directly hit by the impact of the Glass Orb, rendering it useless in holding on to the weapon. Meanwhile, the other Glass Orb that was aimed at Elena's ear had...slightly missed the target that Link was

aiming for.

It was unclear whether it was a coincidence or if it was intentional, but Elena had leaned her head at the very last moment towards the Glass Orb near her ear. It was supposed to explode 60 inches away from her, yet now it exploded in half that distance, which was close enough to kill her!

Elena's head was blasted with the full impact of the explosion. Although she had a thick head of hair that might dampen the explosive impact slightly, blood still came streaming out of her ears, immediately staining half of her body in red.

Even with such a serious injury, though, Elena still stayed conscious.

Those big pair of eyes had now gone dull, but they stared fixedly at Eliard's face with the same warmth and tenderness that had been there before. There was even a weak but sincere smile on her face now.

"Forgive me...my love."

Those were the last words that parted Elena's lips. Then, with the gentle smile still on her face, she died.

Nothing happened to Eliard, though. He did not blow up into pieces the way Elena had threatened would happen. There was no change in his body at all.

Eliard slumped down to the ground. Then, he seemed to suddenly think of something and rushed up to Elena's body and held it tight against his chest. He then raised his head up to heaven and bawled at the top of his lungs, his voice drenched in sorrow.

He felt he could understand Elena now. She was a priestess of a dark cult and was on a certain mission, so she had to use her charms to lure the men to use them to her advantage.

But Eliard was sure that she loved him. She had ridiculed him and used cold and vicious words with him when her secret plot was about to be revealed to the world because she wanted to taunt Eliard into killing her.

What other choice would she have?

"Ahhhhhhh!!!!!"

If someone had pierced a knife through Eliard's heart right now, the pain would still have been less than what he currently felt.

My love is dead. My life is over, thought Eliard as he clung to Elena's lifeless body.

Meanwhile, Link was also shaken by what had just happened. He looked at Elena's corpse and then at his friend Eliard who was suffering in immense pain. His eyebrows knitted so closely together that they were joined into one.

Did she intend to die? Were her feelings for Eliard sincere? Or was it all just a ruse?

What was true? Or was it all a lie? Even Link wasn't so sure now.

Chapter 168

The Downfall of a Genius

The King's Lane

Eliard was devastated. He held Elena's corpse in his arms and fell into a state of despair.

Link could not bear to see his best friend in such great pain. It was a heart-wrenching moment. As for the coachman, he simply stayed in the corner and was too scared to move.

However, even though he was paralyzed with fear, he was also the only person who had no connection with the issue. His awareness and judgment were not as seriously affected as the rest.

His gaze alternated between Link, Eliard and Elena's corpse when all of a sudden, he saw a faint glow emanating from Elena's corpse, which disappeared quickly after circling once around her chest.

The speed of this light ball was extremely fast. Everything happened in the blink of an eye. When the coachman tried to look more closely after rubbing his eyes, all that was left was a body covered in blood.

Originally, the coachman wanted to report this phenomenon to Link, but immediately dismissed the idea. These Magicians would kill without batting an eyelid in the heat of the moment. This is too horrifying. I would be better off if I stay out of this.

Link was too preoccupied and shocked by Elena's rashness to notice this minute detail. Furthermore, he was completely focused on Eliard and paid no notice to Elena's corpse. As for Eliard, he was thoroughly devastated and had practically no awareness of his surroundings.

The coachman lost sight of the light ball instantly. He did not realize that it had floated to the back of the carriage. The light emanating from it was dim, much like a highly transparent glass orb. It was also very small in size, only about the size of a thumb. It

carefully evaded Link's field of vision and slowly drifted into the forest beside the carriage.

It took its time and slowly bobbed up and down till it had covered a distance of about 300 feet. It then accelerated to a speed almost ten times faster than its original, leaving shockwaves and wind in its path. It traveled straight into the depths of the Girvent Forest.

After a while, a farm appeared in its field of vision. There was a beautiful manor in the middle of the farm. It should be the property of a small noble family.

The farm did not cover a large area. There were about 30 households over the 1000-acre land. In the farms beside the village, one could see many farmers hard at work, and at the northwest corner of the farm under a large tree was simply a cemetery built simply from wooden fences.

There were over ten people surrounding the cemetery. A pale-faced female corpse laid on the ground while a man cried uncontrollably while holding her in his arms. From his muttering, one could determine that the deceased woman was his wife who died from difficult childbirth. There were two farmers beside the body who were hard at work digging a pit to bury the woman.

The woman was dead for less than a day. As it was winter, the body still looked as though it had some vitality.

The dim light started traveling even faster upon this sight and rushed into the body of this young woman.

The man was still holding his wife's body while lamenting about her tragic life. However, the next moment, he let go of the body and stared at it with a horrified expression. His lips moved but no words came out of his mouth.

"What happened, Joseph?" Someone asked.

"Lisa seemed to have moved a while back." The person called Joseph sounded slightly uncertain. His wife had already stopped moving, causing him to suspect that it was all his illusion.

"Don't be too sad, Joseph. Lisa has already gone to heaven," another person comforted.

Joseph agreed with his gaze still glued to his wife's body. At that moment, the body moved again. Her chest even showed faint signs of breathing, validating the presence of life.

Joseph was extremely convinced this time. He was surprised and elated and immediately placed his ears on his wife's chest to listen for a heartbeat. He then heard faint but clear thumping sounds!

Joseph was ecstatic. He shouted, "Lisa is not dead. She is still alive! She has returned from the dead. Oh God of Light, thank you for your kindness!"

How can someone come back from the dead? Everyone thought Joseph was going insane from the depression and looked at him with a compassionate gaze.

However, as Lisa's breathing became more visible and showed more obvious signs of life such as coughing, no one doubted Joseph's words anymore.

"Oh my god, Lisa really is back."

"But I saw her die with my own eyes!" A middle-aged woman screamed in horror. She was a midwife and had delivered countless babies. She had never seen a woman come back to life from a difficult childbirth!

"This must be the blessing of the God of Light! He must have been touched by Joseph's love." This was an illogical explanation. However, in a world where gods were proven to have existed and even appeared throughout the annals of history, this was a sound and persuasive argument.

Finally, an old man walked out. He was Joseph's father. He said, "Alright Joseph. Lisa may have been resurrected. However, she is still very weak. Take her back home immediately!"

"Yes!" Joseph was extremely happy and he felt as though he had unlimited energy. He hugged Lisa and ran all the way back home.

In his embrace, Elena sighed. Master's magic is indeed powerful...but this body was too heavily damaged. Also, she seems to be an ordinary village woman. She must have been bounded to many menial tasks and household chores every day. It might not be easy to escape from this place.

She then started to recall her past memories. When Elena's physical body suffered lethal injuries, she expelled her soul from that body and left. However, that was not before she took a close look at the contents of the scroll using the Eye of the Soul.

The soul was the most basic and pure state of life, with the ability to record any information with objectivity and faith. In other words, a person in that state would have an eidetic memory.

As Elena recalled, bits and pieces of the contents would slowly appear in her mind. Every detail was clear and defined. She had a look of satisfaction on her face. That's a relief. Although it had been a dangerous mission, I somehow completed it perfectly. Most importantly, I seemed to have destroyed a brilliant Magician in the World of Light. This is extremely worth it!

With Eliard's sensitivity, he must have thought that I deliberately took the attack. He must be devastated and might even fall into depression. He has also just turned 18, which was the golden period for any Magician to increase their strength. If his depression could last for a couple of years, his magic achievements would definitely be substantially reduced in the future. This would mean that she had gotten rid of a potential enemy.

It was even possible that he might turn against Link. Elena could not help but chuckle at that thought.

How perfect. Elena was proud. Perhaps I will feel slightly bad for deceiving Eliard. No, he is an enemy, I must be ruthless! Show no compassion and pity in the face of an enemy. This is master's teachings!"

...

Link could only sigh as all the light went out in Eliard's eyes. It wouldn't help to simply stay on King's Lane. He turned to the coachman and said, "Let's return to the academy."

"Yes, Mr. Link." The coachman immediately nodded. Link was pretty famous within the academy and he had long heard of his name.

The carriage turned in the opposite direction and slowly made its way back.

Along the way, no one spoke. Even the horses seemed to have detected the repressive atmosphere and trotted as lightly as possible.

When they arrived back at the academy, the carriage stopped in front of Herrera's Mage Tower. Link stepped forward to open the carriage door as Eliard dragged his feet towards the Mage Tower with Elena's bloody corpse in his arms.

When the Magician's Apprentices in the hall saw the situation, many of them exclaimed or screamed in horror.

"Oh my god."

"What happened?"

"Elena just said that she was feeling unwell, how could she have..."

Eliard ignored all the comments and simply walked towards the staircase.

Herrera was bound to know if such a serious thing happened in the Mage Tower. As Eliard climbed the stairs, she appeared at the platform on the second floor.

"Eliard, what happened?" Herrera stared at the bloodied corpse with a look of disbelief.

In her eyes, Elena was a conscientious and hardworking student. She also had a flair for magic. She was even optimistic about her relationship with Eliard, confident that it would become a beautiful story she could tell to her next batch of students. How did things turn out like this?

Eliard did not answer the questions and simply walked past Herrera. He had no idea why he did that. His only aim now was to satisfy his stubborn inner self and bring Elena back home, to the small room where they had spent countless happy moments together.

As Herrera did not get an answer, she then looked at Link, "What is going on?"

Link smiled bitterly and said, "Master, I need to tell you this in private."

"Alright. Come to my room." Herrera walked towards the highest floor while Link followed closely behind.

When they reached the hall at the highest floor of the Mage Tower, Link took out his memory crystal and activated it. Images of the event in the Girvent Forest appeared.

The talks Elena had with the merchants in the forest, the suicide of the merchant on King's Lane, all of them were displayed clearly in front of Herrera.

Herrera had a look of disbelief on her face. "This is Elena?"

This was the complete opposite from the obedient and hardworking Elena she knew!

"It should be her if she doesn't have a twin sister." Link threw his hands out helplessly. It seemed as though he had successfully stopped Elena. However, he felt that something was amiss although he could not point out exactly where.

"Do you know the contents of the scroll?" Herrera did not dwell much on Elena's deception. Her main concern now was the scrolls, which were the most important object of the incident.

"I have no idea. I guess the scrolls are still on Elena's body. When I stopped her, she was about to escape. However, it might not be easy now that Eliard is devastated." Link could totally understand Eliard's actions. If he were to be in Eliard's shoes, he might have already gone insane.

"What exactly happened that made Eliard so depressed?" Herrera could feel that Eliard was not in a good shape.

Link then recounted the incident at King's Lane in detail. When he was done, Herrera fell silent.

It took some time before she sighed, "I have no idea if Elena had true feelings for Eliard. However, I know that it will be difficult for Eliard to recover given his personality."

Eliard was sincere, generous and even a little stubborn. Once he decided to go into a relationship, he would definitely put all his emotions into maintaining it. Now that his partner had willingly died for him, he might be stuck in this whirlpool of remorse for his entire life.

In other words, a talented Magician like Eliard might meet his downfall because of Elena.

Upon hearing Herrera's words, Link immediately recalled the merchant who willingly died for Elena. He suddenly felt a chill down his spine.

The merchant was merely an ordinary person and was, naturally, easily manipulated. However, Eliard was a world-class genius and was way more difficult to control. That might be why Elena adopted the destructive approach to ruin him.

And it looked like she was successful.

Had her ability to manipulate people reached that level?

So... is she really dead? Link was starting to feel unsure.

Chapter 169

Fistfights and Friendship

Eliard had been staying in his room all the time after coming back to the Mage Tower. He didn't eat or drink. He just sat there staring at Elena's body in a daze. No one knew what he was thinking about.

On the second day, Herrera searched Elena's body and found three scrolls containing the detailed map of the internal layout of the Master Magicians' Mage Towers.

Eliard looked on numbly throughout the entire process. He didn't stop Herrera from her search, but neither did he speak to her or make any movements at all. He just sat there motionless like an inanimate sculpture.

No one disturbed him after the discovery of the scrolls, because they had caused an uproar throughout the entire academy.

Even prominent Magicians in the Master Magicians' Mage Towers could be bought with gold coins, and it turned out that they had sold the secrets of three Mage Towers! The whole academy was shocked by this terrifying revelation.

The dean, Anthony was understandably furious when he got wind of this news. He was now afraid for the safety of the academy, which was why he presided over the operation to cleanse the academy of traitorous and corrupt Magicians once and for all. The Magicians who had sold the academy's secrets were naturally stripped off their magic powers, their memories of the Mage Towers wiped out of their minds and they were cast out of the academy.

All the merchants involved in the plot suddenly disappeared off the face of the earth. This wasn't the academy's doing, though, but was the work of the MI3. The East Cove Magic Academy was within the Norton Kingdom's territory after all, when something terrible happened there, rumors said that the king himself had taken special interest in this matter.

After the purge, Anthony and the other members of the academy's high council began to rectify the gaps in the security system of the academy and planned confidential

measures to make sure that something like this could never happen again.

Link held no important position in the academy, so he had little to do with all these follow-up measures. Besides, he'd already received generous rewards from the dean, which was the pass to enter the dean's Mage Tower anytime he wished. Plus, he was allowed to use the Level-6 Elemental Pool in the dean's Mage Tower up to six hours per week and the permission to freely browse any books he liked in the dean's library.

It was just what he needed right now.

Although the traitors in the academy had all been rooted out and it seemed that the dark forces had been thwarted, Link still felt an indescribable uneasiness in his mind. This type of unease always drove Link to forget everything else and focus on learning magic and advancing his level.

With this obsessive determination, Link had made immense progress in a short time, but it was still not good enough for him. Once Link began to learn a Level-6 spell, he realized that he had far underestimated the difficulty in becoming a Master Magician.

Link now knew what a nonsense fantasy it was to try to reach Level-8 in three months. It would be a miracle if he could even master a Level-7 spell well enough to know how to use it in a real battle in that time.

This discovery caused Link to become quite exasperated.

Still, Link's true strength was in his unrelenting attitude towards something that he'd set out to do. No matter what kind of difficulties he faced, even if they seemed to be insuperable, he would never give up even though he might feel frustrated. He would just quickly adapt to the current situation then find the best solution in order to move on.

Thus, although he didn't know if he could achieve his goal, he never stopped working hard to try to advance his level to the highest point that he could muster.

Link slept for six hours a day and didn't drink or eat but depended on magic spells to maintain his body's health. He would cast the spell, Elemental Cure on his body once in the morning and once before he went to sleep at night, and that was enough to let him go through the day.

That was how his days went by for the past week. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to

say that Link had completely immersed himself in the world of magic spells and had completely given up the joy of life.

Late one night after the tiring week, Link was walking back to Herrera's Mage Tower in utter exhaustion from the Heaven's Thorn. Just as he was approaching the Mage Tower's entrance, he saw Eliard standing there waiting for him.

Within a week, the originally well-built Eliard had become emaciated and his dark blue eyes were now deep-set and dull. Even his skin had gotten grayish. He looked nothing like his former self.

"Eliard, why are you so...?" Link was at a loss for how to face this friend of his. Even with all things considered, Link was still the one to cause Elena's death. There was no way for him to avoid this fact. Admittedly part of the reason why Link had been obsessively learning magic all this while was to avoid meeting Eliard.

A faint smile appeared on Eliard's face. He looked at the tired face and bloodshot eyes of his friend's and shook his head gently.

"You don't have to blame yourself, Link," he said. "You did the right thing. I don't blame you for it at all."

It had been a week now and Eliard had given it much thought. He had resented Link for a time, but it only lasted for a few hours. He understood well that Link had done what he should do to protect the safety of the academy. The one at fault wasn't Link, it was Elena. Still, Eliard couldn't bring himself to blame Elena either. She's dead now anyway.

In the end, the only thing Eliard hated was his fate. He couldn't understand why fate had to torture him so. Fate had brought him to a woman he loved, yet it also snatched her away so quickly. Nothing could be crueler than that!

Meanwhile, Link felt no sense of relief at all after hearing what Eliard just said. He grew even more worried instead and felt he had to say something.

"I..."

"I've decided to give up on magic," said Eliard suddenly.

"What did you say?!" Link's eyes opened wide in shock at Eliard's words. This was the

Magician whose level of genius was one that the world hadn't seen in five hundred years! In the game when Link had reached the Legendary Pinnacle level and was about to fight against Nozama, Eliard had begun to prepare himself to ascend to the level of Archmage while he was only 36 years old!

But now this would-be earth-shattering genius was talking about giving up magic, all because of a woman? This is preposterous!

For what felt like hours, Link just stood there dumbstruck, hardly knowing what to do or how to respond.

Eliard then took out a pouch from his sleeve and used the Magician's Hand to hand it over to Link.

"Here are the 1300 gold coins that I owe you," said Eliard. "I'm paying it all back to you now. Thank you for your selfless help in the past, I...I'm very sorry!"

"..." Link stared at the coin pouch floating in front of him as all kinds of emotions began to stir up in him.

What was Eliard thinking? He's giving up magic and paying off his debts to Link because he wanted to completely sever the friendship between them? All because of a woman from a dark cult? So now that Eliard was heartbroken he was just going to abandon magic just like that?

Anger started to rise up in Link as well. He flung the pouch violently to the ground then rushed up towards Eliard and grabbed his collar.

"You're a coward, do you know that?" Link shouted in Eliard's face. "You're a motherf*cking coward!"

Eliard shoved Link away and his face turned stone cold.

"This is my decision; it's got nothing to do with you!" said Eliard. "If I didn't learn magic, then I wouldn't have met Elena. If it wasn't for magic, Elena wouldn't have died! Magic killed her!"

Those words were the last straw for Link. He was now desperately learning and practicing magic so he could gain enough strength to fight against the Level-8 demon, and he was ready to sacrifice all the joys in his life to achieve that. Still, there was a

thread of hope in him that had got him through all the hardships he faced so far, and that hope had sprung from the fact that he knew he wasn't alone in this fight. He knew that apart from himself there was a genius Magician whose talents could one day save the world from the forces of darkness. He knew that once this young genius grew up and had developed his skills to its full potential, he would be a powerful ally who would fight against the Dark Army with him side-by-side.

And now that damned bastard actually thought of giving up magic?

The flame of anger in Link's heart had gotten to the such an untamable point that he no longer cared about Eliard's feelings.

"You're wrong! It wasn't magic that killed Elena, it was her evil cult!" Link shouted. "If she didn't get killed this time, then she would've died the next time! If she didn't die because of me, then someone else would've killed her once they found out her secret plot! Either way, she would've died anyway!"

Thwack!

As soon as Link finished his sentence he was seeing stars for a moment from the punch to his eye and his cheek was burning with pain from the hit as well.

"You wanna fight?!" Link lunged forward and punched Eliard on his nose till it was gushing out with blood.

Eliard had gotten furious by now. Not only did Link cause Elena's death, he'd even uttered such despicable words, and now he wanted to fight back? And so Eliard punched Link back one more time, this time making him completely punch-drunk with the brunt force of Eliard's fist.

Link wasn't about to just take the punches like a rag doll, though. He threw another hook to Eliard's chin, causing him to lose his balance and he fell to the ground. Then, he went down on the fallen Eliard and prepared to punch him some more.

To Link's surprise, Eliard's response was extremely quick. While he was still on the ground he managed to kick Link with both of his feet and knocked Link down as well. Then, as both of them were now on the ground, they started to fight like dogs with one person punching and the other kicking, then one socked the other with his elbow and the other responded with his knee. This went on for a few minutes, neither party was willing to be the first person to stop.

Link had been leading an easy life in the past few months, so although he was still not as strong and muscular as Eliard, he had gained considerable physical strength and was no longer the scrawny kid that he used to be. Eliard, on the other hand, had gotten much thinner and weaker in the past week, which meant that both of them were now fighting as equals. Neither of them had used magic, though, because they knew that once magic was involved the other party might get killed. Even though they were both angry at each other they still had no wish to kill each other yet.

Both of them had been storing much anger and frustration all this while, so now they treated each other as punching bags to release the pent-up emotions inside them.

After a few minutes, the entrance door of the Mage Tower was suddenly opened and the crystal lamp hanging over the door lit up as well. Then, Herrera's wrathful face emerged out from the inside of the Mage Tower.

She had rushed down here from her room in a flurry. She was still wearing her nightdress and her hair was messy as she just got out of bed. She reached the Mage Tower entrance only to see two of her proudest disciples brawling on the ground like common street dogs.

Link's face was swollen to the size of a pig's head, one of his eye sockets was black and blue and his lips were cracked and bloody while the Magician's robe on his body was torn to tatters. Eliard's conditions were even worse as his body had been weakening for the past week. When Herrera emerged from the door she saw Link sitting on Eliard and bashing into his face with his fists!

At this moment, Eliard's face was even more swollen than Link's, his nose was dripping with blood which stained the clothes on his chest red. One of his eyes had ballooned almost to the size of a peach and it was obvious that Eliard couldn't open it anymore. That strikingly handsome face of his was now such a mess that it wasn't even human-like!

Not only that, but all around them hundreds of gold coins scattered and rolled about. Three shoes were seen nearby – the last one was still on Link's left foot.

What a scene it was!

"Enough, both of you!" bellowed Herrera in rage.

Among both of them, one was already a genius Magician who had begun to attract

fame and reputation in the outside world. Meanwhile, the other was a young Magician with nearly perfect innate talents in magic and limitless potential to develop in the future. The fact that two outstanding talents had emerged in the span of a few months was indeed a miracle, yet now both of them ended up wrestling each other in the dirt was such a shame! If rumors of this incident ever spread out they'd be the laughing stock of the whole kingdom!

Now that they saw their tutor, Link, who had long tired out his arms, stood up immediately. His strength by then had almost reached its limit and his fists could no longer throw any more punches. He was sure that if they persisted any longer he would be completely overwhelmed by the physically stronger Eliard.

Eliard was as worn out as a pair of old boots himself, so he clambered up onto his feet and stood in front of Herrera right beside Link. They both bent their heads down, staring at the ground like children who knew they were in trouble and were about to be punished.

Herrera was initially about to explode in anger, but when she saw how innocently child-like Link and Eliard looked, she suddenly found it all amusing instead. She must keep a stern appearance, though.

"Tidy up these things on the ground and get yourselves back to your rooms!" she said sternly.

At that moment Herrera felt as if she was a foster mother of two immature young boys.

Herrera was a respected tutor to both Link and Eliard, so they quickly and quietly obeyed her command and went about picking up their shoes and the gold coins that scattered about everywhere on the ground.

Link picked up his right shoe and tried to put it back on, but just then he happened to glance at Eliard who was squatting on the ground trying to put on his shoes as well. Link saw how the face that used to be the envy of men and the adoration of women now looked as swollen as a pig's! Link suddenly found it so hilarious that he erupted into uncontrollable laughter.

Eliard saw how Link's face was further disfigured with his laughter and couldn't hold back his laughter either. Soon enough the two friends were both laughing at each other's ridiculous faces.

But after a while, Eliard was reminded again of his own fate, which caused him to cry. He wept for the loss of his beloved Elena, he wept for the hard times he had to endure ever since his parents abandoned him on the streets when he was just a baby. He sat on the ground and wept and wept at his tragic fate until the initial sobs turned into howling wails.

Link and Herrera looked at each other then at Eliard in sympathy. Link then started to pick up all the gold coins with the Magician's Hand as he was too tired to do it himself. It only took a few seconds before all the gold coins were collected in the pouch. He then put the pouch into the storage bracelet he got from the Dark Elf Magician, Parson. This storage bracelet had been purged of all dark magic auras and had even been slightly modified by Link himself so no one could ever recognize its Dark Elven origins anymore.

All traces of anger in Link's heart had subsided after the brief fistfight.

"Here, take this," said Link as he slipped the storage bracelet onto Eliard's wrist.

"Take it with you and go outside and explore the world for a while. You'll feel better soon enough. But don't ever think about giving up on magic again."

Eliard said nothing in reply, he just nodded in agreement.

The fight just now had also cleansed Eliard's heart of all anger and resentment towards his friend. Looking back, he finally realized that things hadn't been so bad that he must give up everything in life and run away.

Elena was still the love of his life, of course, and he naturally still ached and grieved for her loss. But that didn't change the fact that she was dead now and will always stay in the past. Link was right, he should go out of the academy and explore the world and get a change of scenery for a while. He knew that it would certainly help him recover and feel better then.

As for magic, Eliard now realized that it was not the cause of Elena's death after all. Without magic, Elena would've died of the blade of swords or daggers or the arrows, or maybe even of the dark divine spells that Elena was involved with. Eliard knew more than anyone else how cruel this world could be.

Eliard understood clearly now that giving up magic would be tantamount to giving up his own life.

"Aren't you building your new estate, Link?" asked Eliard suddenly. "I could go there and help you out."

Link was momentarily stunned, but he recovered himself quickly and gave Eliard a firm nod. Once he'd put on his shoes, he stood up and walked towards Eliard then extended a hand out to him.

"It would be my pleasure," said Link.

Eliard reached out to catch Link's hand and got himself up to his feet. He suddenly realized that Elena wasn't as perfect as she had been in his imagination after all. Instead, it was this friend of his here who'd been like a brother to him all along who was the one person he could rely on whenever he's in trouble.

Chapter 170

The Awakened Prophet White Stone (1)

Eliard was extremely decisive. He immediately set off the next day with Link's letter in hand.

At the moment, the Flamingo Band of Mercenaries were destroying the bandit's hideout in the entire Ferde Wilderness with the help of Magician Carrido. Carrido did not go through official magic training and lacked a comprehensive understanding of magic. Many a times, his strength was not sufficient.

Eliard, on the other hand, did not have this problem. He was a Level-2 Magician and had a solid foundation in magic. With his help, the process would be a lot smoother.

In the letter, Link specifically instructed Jacker to take special care of Eliard. It would be fine if they slowed down the clearing process, but Eliard must be kept safe.

Link strongly believed that Eliard would recover from this state of depression after making some new friends and training together with the mercenary band.

As for Link, he was still completely focused on magic. Everything else was secondary.

Now that Eliard's matter was resolved, Link could focus entirely on his magic research, increasing the efficiency exponentially. He gradually spent more time on it until he merely slept four hours a day.

Herrera was horrified at the sight of such insane dedication. She was afraid Link's body would not be able to withstand such intense hours. However, after failing to persuade him to take more rest, she started giving Link strange potions said to nourish the body and forcing him to drink them.

Link had no choice but to drink them. He did not expect them to really be effective. When he felt his energy getting boosted, he was pleasantly surprised and delved into his research with even more fanaticism.

The days flew by. After 20 days, Link had made huge progress with his biggest

achievement being a thorough understanding of the magic structure of a Level-6 spell.

He possessed the precious Fire Star Thorium and preferred fire elemental spells in general. This Level-6 spell was naturally also fire element based, called the Fist of Firomoz.

The Fist of Firomoz

Level-6 spell

Effect: Concentrates fire elementals into a giant fist. It possesses terrifying offensive power!

(Note: Inspired by a scroll fragment left in the mortal world by Flame Titan Firomoz)

The Titans were an extremely powerful ancient civilization. It was rumored that they had not gone extinct. However, Link had never met any of them even when he was playing the game.

The reason he chose to learn the Fist of Firomoz was simple. This spell was basically an upgraded version of his Level-5 spell, The Flaming Hand. There were many similarities in the magic structure of both spells, giving Link the inspiration to unify the good ideas in both of them.

A fist and a hand. If the fingers of a hand were tucked in, wouldn't it become a fist?

He should have mastered a Level-6 spell in half a month. However, Link spent almost a whole month at it instead, due to his stubbornness in putting the innovation into practice.

He had already achieved the initial success. All that was left was the execution.

As it was a Level-6 spell, the elemental pool in Herrera's Mage Tower would not be sufficient. Link then headed towards the Heaven's Thorn to conduct his experiment.

In order to prevent any careless mistakes, Link gave himself a good rest the night before.

Early in the morning, Link could be seen rushing to the Heaven's Thorn. The door opened quickly after a few knocks and Selasse, Herrera's senior in magic, stood behind

the door.

"Why are you here so early today?" Selasse was Anthony's disciple. However, his magic talent was ordinary at best. He had only achieved the strength of a Level-3 Magician even though he was almost 40 years old. His expertise lay in the literary world. He had already written more than ten poetries well known across the Norton Kingdom. He was an extremely talented person as well. He was also kind and amiable. Usually, he would be Link's host whenever Link decided to visit the Heaven's Thorn.

"Is the sub elemental pool occupied today?" Link asked. The elemental pools in the Heaven's Thorn had the best functions in the entire academy. It was always fully booked and would rarely have any empty slots.

Selasse smiled and said, "You are the first one today. You have 90 minutes."

Ninety minutes was already very generous. On normal days, Link would only get 50 minutes in the elemental pool, which was already a long duration on the account that he had a good relationship with Anthony. Other Magicians usually only got 30 minutes in the elemental pool and would have to apply for it a week in advance. They could not simply enter and use it as freely as Link.

Link then followed Selasse into the Mage Tower. When he reached the hall, he saw two people clad in purple robes. They seemed to be waiting for someone.

Their magic robes had many unique characteristics. They were light purple in color and extremely thick. There were patterns similar to that of a bramble sewn onto their sleeves with silver threads. On their chest was a picture of a roaring lion. At the same time, the surface of the magic robe seemed to be covered in a layer of a special, sticky liquid.

Link recognized this magic robe. It was a magic robe of the Norton Army Magicians. The sticky layer of liquid was a defense spell specially developed by the Royal Magicians in the Kingdom called Tenacity. As the Magicians climbed in rank, the color of the robe would change ever so slightly and the strength of Tenacity would also increase.

There were a total of six levels: Basic Tenacity, then going into Mid-Level Tenacity, High-Level Tenacity, Heroic Tenacity and finally, Endless Tenacity.

This defensive spell could defend against both magical and physical attacks. It also had

excellent stability and strength. It was rumored that the strongest Endless Tenacity could defend against a Level-6 offensive spell head-on.

From the magic fluctuations coming from these two Magicians. They should be in the Mid-Level Tenacity stage. They also had the presence of a Level-3 Magician, probably Elite Magicians in the Kingdom. They were casually chatting and seemed to be in a good mood.

"Are they any good news about the war in the North?" Link asked curiously. If they had lost the war, the two Magicians should have been depressed and silent. The gleeful look on their faces could then only mean one thing.

Selasse then introduced them with a smile, "We are victorious in the Battle of the Ice Peak. The Kingdom army charged ferociously ahead and left the Dark Elves unprepared. We have already secured three consecutive victories. The rest of the Kingdom's army was also converging to the Ice Peak to support the war and continue our winning streak."

Link was relieved and elated to hear this news. This was a victory unheard of while he was playing the game, which was proof that he had indeed changed the course of history.

"That is good news; it is indeed time to teach them a lesson. However, the Kingdom is still rather unprepared. Isn't it too risky to go all out in this state?" Link was still slightly worried. He felt that the Kingdom was being too rash and arrogant, probably due to their bolstered confidence from the consecutive victories.

Selasse shrugged his shoulders and said, "I don't know much about the military. I would believe that the generals have their reason for doing this."

"That is true." Link nodded. He was not well-informed about the situation in the North. He was thus in no position to comment on the general's decisions.

He then turned his attention away from the Royal Magicians. He had limited time in the elemental pool and had to make good use of it.

While Link was observing the Royal Magicians, they also noticed his presence in the hall.

The two of them were originally Magicians from the academy. However, they left the

academy two months ago for the war in the North. At that time, Link was still not famous.

In the Battle of the Ice Peak, the two of them performed exceptionally well and had gotten credit for their achievements. They were promoted to a first-class captain and a second-class captain respectively. This time, the reason for their return was to apply for more magic materials from the dean, while also giving him an overview of the current situation.

Both of them felt extremely puzzled that such a young Magician was able to enter the Heaven's Thorn.

"Arthur, who is that young man?" one of them asked.

The person named Arthur knew slightly more than his comrade. He said, "He is Link, a member of the Morani family and the disciple of the great beauty Moira. I heard that he is already a Level-4 Magician. He is extremely talented."

"Level-4...what talent. However, I don't reckon he will do well in a real-life battle. He looks so young and inexperienced."

"Who knows." Arthur shrugged his shoulders. "It does not matter even if he is bad in combat. With his talent, he would definitely reach the upper echelons of the academy in the future. He might even become a member of the six-man council. He would not even need to go on the battlefield."

"Alright, what a blessed life." This Magician sighed with a slight look of contempt on his face.

He had already spent more than two months on the battlefield. In that period, he had survived seven battles and killed 15 Dark Elves. He was no longer the rookie Magician in the past. Those Magicians who were still studying in the academy or had just graduated from the academy were all termed as rookie Magicians.

Hence, despite Link's fame in the academy, he was merely an inexperienced rookie Magicians in his eyes.

Link had already disappeared into the staircase passage. Arthur then waved his hands and said, "Alright let's stop talking about him. Romey, now that the situation in the North is optimistic. I might get promoted to a general after the war and even wear a

magic robe enchanted with Heroic Tenacity."

Romey laughed, "You shouldn't stop there. My aim is the Endless Tenacity magic robe!"

Chapter 171

The Awakened Prophet White Stone (2)

At the Heaven's Thorn Mage Tower.

The Elemental Pool here was slightly larger than the one in Herrera's Mage Tower, although the layout and the function were still identical. The positions of the various runes on the controlling magic seal were basically the same as well, so after nearly a month of use, Link now knew every inch of this Elemental Pool like the back of his hand.

Because it was the same type of spell as the Flaming Hand, the Fist of Firomoz also had similar Mana consumptions pattern with the former spell. It consumed 100 points of Mana in spell structure construction and 15 points per second to maintain it in normal conditions, which meant that it would consume 900 Mana Points per minute. When in active battles though, it would consume as much as 30 points of Mana per second or even 50 points per second if the battle was especially fierce.

Link's current maximum Mana limit was 1950 points, so if he used this spell in a battle all of it would be depleted within one minute. This was just not good enough for Link, so after some consideration Link decided to spend some of his Omni Points to increase this limit.

Link had 210 Omni Points at the moment. There was one active mission left which was the mission to investigate the truths behind the Black Moon Conspiracy. Although he had rooted out the mole in the academy, Elena, he still received no notification that confirmed the completion of this mission, and so naturally he hadn't received the rewards as well. This was one of the main reasons why Link had felt uneasy all this while

"System, raise the maximum Mana limit using 100 Omni Points."

Are you sure?

"Yes!"

In a blink of an eye, Link felt a warm surge in the depths of his body. He felt no pain this time. Instead, it actually felt quite comfortable, as though the dry desert sand was quenched with a torrent of reinvigorating rain. Every single cell in his body seemed to be singing in joy at the upgrade.

This wonderful feeling lasted for five seconds. Link then checked his own status and found that his maximum Mana limit was now 2950.

Now that's a maximum Mana limit fit for a Level-6 Magician!

Then, Link checked his Mana recovery rate and discovered that it was currently at 100 points per hour. It wasn't too bad, so Link decided not to change anything about it.

So now Link still had 110 Omni Points. He thought it best to keep these points as a spare, just in case he didn't have enough power when the demon, Tarviss was released and needed the extra Omni Points to purchase a high-level spell.

Now that his maximum Mana limit was raised, Link then began to experiment with the spell.

He focused all of his spirits and entered the state of absolute calm that was spellcasting. Bit by bit, his Mana was directed into the controlling magic seal. Because this was a Level-6 spell, its structure was more complicated and intricate by twofold, and now it was even more so because it had been modified slightly by Link. The number of runes used in this spell was as high as 989, with the complexity in its connections and stacking structure at a degree that was unimaginable for ordinary Magicians.

Even Link whose soul's strength was far beyond that of the average Magician still didn't dare to commit any mistakes while constructing the spell structure. In the end, he spent five full minutes to complete the links and connections between the 989 runes in the Fist of Firomoz's spell structure.

A brilliant array of light spots then appeared on the controlling magic seal. At a glance, it looked very similar to the map of constellations Link had seen in his previous life. Soon afterwards the magic structure began to oscillate and the fire elements in the pool responded to this immediately as the Fist of Firomoz began to take form.

The speed at which the fire elements surged was so rapid that there was a whistling sound in the air which was unlike any other spell that Link had mastered so far.

Yet, this was only the scaled down version of the Fist of Firomoz simulated in the restricted environment of the Elemental Pool. Had it been used in actual combat, the speed at which the fire elements converged in real time would definitely have been a terrifying sight to behold.

Then, Link suddenly recalled the Level-6 spell Herrera had used in the Mist Basin called the Edge of Zenith, where she cut down the mighty giant hydra in one single move. He didn't pay much attention to it then, but right now he truly appreciated the Level-6 spell's intricacy and complexity not to mention its awesome power.

It was a totally different experience from the game.

Although the game was an immersive holographic online system with very sensitive controls that made it feel life-like, it still paled in comparison to the details and subtlety of actually being in this world.

The Level-6 Magician will be called a Master Magician, thought Link. Not just because of the extreme difficulty in the process of level advancement, but also in the power of the spells. What a terrifying power these spells contain!

About 20 seconds later, after the elements were fully assembled, Link noticed that the amount of fire elements in the pool had dropped by 80% and was replaced by a giant Flaming Hand that curled its fingers into a fist emerging from the middle of the Elemental Pool.

Because it was just the miniature version at only 10% of its full form, the fist was only about ten square feet in size. It was glowing very faintly and was enveloped by rings and rings of red-hot flame. This was a type of force field that Link had modified into the spell which would help Link control the fire elements in the spell, so they would explode at the very precise moment that he wished them to.

Attack! Link directed the spell through the magic seal.

The fire elements in the fiery fist immediately got agitated and radiated a blinding ray of blue light. The light coming out of the fist was as bright as the sun at noon when one wouldn't be able to look directly at it.

When the Fist of Firomoz was used to attack an opponent, the fist would rush towards the target at an unimaginable speed within the range of 300 feet and anything that stood in its way would be leveled to the ground.

In the game, this spell was Link's favorite to use against city walls because with a single punch, the walls would crumble down like a house of cards, creating a beautiful yet at the same time terrifying effect that would strike terror in the enemies' hearts.

Transform! Link gave out another command to the spell.

For a brief moment the flaming fist dimmed its brightness and slowly opened up its fingers one-by-one, which in the end formed into a giant hand that seemed to be ready to claw into something.

It was not the Fist of Firomoz anymore now, but was instead, a new spell modified with Link's Supreme Magical Skill—an upgraded Level-6 Flaming Hand.

This kind of modification was totally unthinkable in his previous life in the game. But now that he was in this world, Link was able to create this brand-new spell by fusing his deep understanding of the structures and properties of the Flaming Hand and the Fist of Firomoz and transformed them into a uniquely powerful spell.

Link's heart was filled with a sense of accomplishment when he finally saw the new spell in its full form.

Return to normal, ordered Link with a thought. He must ensure that there were no defects in this spell whatsoever.

The upgraded Flaming Hand then clenched into a fist, but just as it was returning to its former shape, a problem emerged.

The originally stable flames suddenly wavered as the fire elements within it vibrated violently. Link could feel even then that the spell structure was beginning to collapse.

He tried with all his might to stabilize the spell structure but realized only a second later that the problem was too big to control. He might even break his arm if he persisted, so he decided to let go of the spell and let it collapse.

Boom!!!

The Flaming Hand was only halfway in its process of turning back into a fist when it disintegrated and exploded. Fortunately, this happened in the Elemental Pool so Link was protected from the force of the explosion and was unharmed. The scattered fire elements then flowed back into the pool under the guidance of the magic seal with no

incidence.

Then, Link began to examine the structure of the spell closely.

"System, activate the playback of the spell formation," Link ordered the gaming system.

Link could've just used the system to perform the simulation of the spellcasting like he did when he was on his way back to Pufferfish County, but he chose to use the Elemental Pool to experiment on the spell as the simulation would exert too much energy from his soul and give him debilitating headaches afterwards. There wouldn't be any problem, though, if he only used the simulation to replay the process of the spell formation.

There was a bright flash on the interface. Soon, the whole spellcasting process was re-enacted before Link's eyes starting from the surge of Mana, to the interactions between the magic runes, the synergy between the runic wheels in the spell structure and so on. Every detail, however minute, was shown without any omission.

After three minutes Link finally found the source of the problem. He started fine-tuning to fix the spell structure which took ten more minutes, and then he went right back to experimenting.

This time, the Fist of Firomoz completed six movements in half a minute until it collapsed with another boom.

Link persisted and tried one more time.

He fixed the spell structure then tried casting it again. This time it completed 13 moves before it collapsed.

Link tried one more time.

This time it managed until the 19th move, then collapsed.

One more attempt.

Another collapsed spell...

...

Link had completely forgotten how much time had passed in the Elemental Pool. He was surprised that no one had come in to remind him of the time today.

Neither did he remember how many times he had been modifying and fine-tuning the spell.

The spell in front of him was now as flexible as a real human hand and could move in a variety of delicate movements just like a real hand. Apart from being able to do things that even a real hand couldn't, such as bending a finger backwards until it touched the back of the hand, there was no difference between the front and the back of the giant hand, so it was futile to use the concepts of the palm and the back of the hand with this spell. In fact, even the fingers could transform into the palm and the palm could just as easily split into multiple fingers.

After experimenting it for a period of time that even Link wasn't sure how long, he had successfully performed hundreds of different movements perfectly with the giant hand.

Ah, I've finally mastered it! Link thought proudly.

Then, a notification appeared on the interface.

Player successfully created a new spell, 20 Omni Points rewarded.

Player successfully became a Level-6 Master Magician, 120 Omni Points rewarded.

Please name the new spell.

Ah, it feels nice to be rewarded, thought Link. Then he suddenly noticed that something was amiss. He didn't recall getting rewards for advancing to Level-5.

"System, where are my rewards for rising up to Level-5?" Link asked the gaming system.

Player used the system's spellcasting simulation program when advancing to Level-5, which consumed an extremely high amount of energy from the system. The Omni Points from the rewards were used in place to repair the system of the depleted energy.

"Then why wasn't I informed about it?" asked Link, his face darkened. He should've

gotten at least 50 Omni Points from the level increase and it was gone just like that. Had he known that it would come at such a high price, Link wouldn't have bothered using such an expensive way to learn a spell.

System is unable to answer this question as the issue is still unresolved.

"..." Link was thrown off by such a perplexing response from the system. He didn't have any desire to press the matter further either, because even though the spellcasting simulation had come at such a high price, it was ultimately worth it. It was because of that Level-5 spell that he managed to defeat three Level-5 Dark Elves, after all, so Link decided to just let the matter slide.

As for the name, Link considered it for a while and said, "I'll name the new spell the Titan's Hand."

Spell successfully named.

Titan's Hand

Level-6 Master Spell

Mana Consumption: 14 points per second in normal conditions, 29 points per second in active battles.

Effects: This is a versatile spell that possesses great power and is perfect for close-distance battles both for attacks and defense.

(Note: Link's masterpiece!)

Link was gladdened by the information he received in the series of notifications, especially of those two descriptions of "Master Magician". It wasn't just in a game now, Link had actually earned the title of a Master Magician by his own crazy amount of effort, and he couldn't help but feel proud of himself.

Link then cast Elemental Cure on himself as he felt quite exhausted now. He then sat down and rested for a while to regain some energy before walking out of the Elemental Pool. When he opened the door, he discovered that it was all quiet outside without a single soul in sight. Link looked out the window and was shocked to see that the sky had turned dark outside.

"Has it been so long?" Link wondered. "But why didn't anyone remind me of the time?" He remembered that he was only allowed to use the Elemental Pool for 90 minutes, but by the looks of it he'd spent the whole day inside! He walked into the great hall on the first floor where the lights were still on and saw Selasse sitting there alone at his desk writing.

When Selasse noticed Link approaching he looked up at him with a pair of eyes that glowed with admiration and respect. Not only that, but he then stood up abruptly and gave Link a bow that Magicians of lower levels usually gave to other Magicians of higher levels.

"Master Magician Link!" greeted Selasse.

Master Magician? Link was stunned and puzzled at how this Magician would find out he was already at Level-6.

"When your stay in the Elemental Pool almost reached 90 minutes, I was going to go in there to remind you of the time, but was prevented from doing so by the dean," explained Selasse. "The Elemental Pool in this Mage Tower has a very strict control system, and it detected your experimentation with a Level-6 spell. Now that you've come out, it must mean that you've successfully mastered a Level-6 spell, isn't that right?"

Selasse then stared at Link with eyes full of awe and respect. Magicians who were able to advance to Level-6 were few and far between, but a 17-year-old Magician who'd achieved that level was simply unprecedented. Selasse realized that he was standing in front of a living legend!

Oh, this is worth writing an epic poem about! Selasse thought. I've even got the opening sorted out, this is how it should go – the sky of magic was dark and barren, no stars had shone since the time of Bryant, and lo! Said the God of Light, let Link be born and he'll shine bright!

Selasse didn't care what anyone else thought, all he knew was that he was quite proud of the poem himself.

"Yes, you're right," said Link, feeling more and more awkward with Selasse's strange stares. He then hurriedly added, "It's pretty late now, I must go back and get some rest."

"Oh, go ahead, Master Magician!" replied Selasse. "You must take care of your precious body!"

"..." Link had no idea how else to reply to this Magician-Poet so he just took the opportunity to flee and return to the safety of his room.

Link was relieved that there was no one else bothering him all the way back to Herrera's Mage Tower, so Link went back peacefully to his room. He looked at the time and found it was only nine in the evening. Usually he would still be studying his magic textbooks at this hour, so naturally he didn't go to bed yet and just took out a book called The Path of the Master and started to read it.

After a while, Link took out the white stone the High Elf prince gave him and played with it in his hands just out of habit. But a while later he discovered that there was something wrong about the stone this time.

The normally plain and ordinary white stone was actually glowing faintly in a white aura!

"Huh, what's going on here?"

Chapter 172

The Awakened Prophet White Stone (3)

Originally, Link had already given up on the white stone he received from the Prince of the High Elves as he simply could not find anything special about it. The dim glow emanating from the stone was thus a pleasant surprise.

He carefully observed the stone for a long time but to no avail. Apart from the faint glow that it was emitting, it was no different from its dormant state.

Link was not about to give up so easily. He then took out the magnifying glass he usually used during enchanting to observe extremely small-sized runes.

This magnifying glass was a necessary tool for every enchanter. Link had also made some modifications to it, allowing him to increase the magnification to a scale 50 times larger. He was able to clearly see runes that were less than 100 nanometers in size with the help of the magnifying glass.

Link had also attempted to view the stone through the magnifying glass previously. However, the surface was still smooth and uninteresting at that time. Link was thus unable to get the information that he needed.

But things were different now.

The magnification coupled with the glowing light of the stone, Link finally got a glimpse of the true nature of the stone!

Through the lenses, the stone's surface still looked smooth, not having the slightest indent. However, there seemed to be a voluminous number of light spots on the surface.

As the light spots were too small, it was impossible to get a good look at their shape even under 50 times magnification. One could only determine that the spots were arranged according to a certain pattern.

Could it be runes? How can runes be so small? Link was in disbelief. He concluded that

the runes were so small that they fell out of the measuring range of nanometers. That could be the only reason why his magnifying glass was unable to even get an approximate shape of the rune.

What should I do?

Link then turned his attention to the magnifying glass. He needed to create one that possessed an even higher magnification, something that would be termed a microscope.

Link had a good knowledge of the optical theories on Earth. He simply had to stack two high convex lenses with high magnification power together. Coupled with Link's magic knowledge, this would be an easy task. He could even challenge the limit of optical theories by using the magic to strengthen the magnification strength of his new microscope.

Link immediately got to work. He took out a few crystals and first refined them using transformation spells until they were completely transparent. He then made use of the Higgs Field to reshape the crystals. In a moment, two high-quality convex lenses were made.

Link did not bother with the structure that would hold the lenses in place. He simply used the Magician's Hand to keep the two convex lenses stable in the air while he made adjustments to their positions. After checking that the magnification was around 1000 times, he was satisfied.

Link then adjusted the light in the room and placed the white stone under his simple home-made microscope.

Under the magnification, it was clear that the light spots were runes. However, they were not composed by merely a single rune, but a circle of them with each circle containing at least hundreds of runes. Even under 1000 times magnification, Link could not determine the exact shape of these runes.

"This stone has at least 1000 over light spots, meaning that there are at least 1000 circles of runes. This is only the surface of it, I have not even delved into its internal structure. What person could have made this monstrosity! Could it be God?"

Link could not help but swear at the sight of the complexity. This was completely beyond his imagination.

Link was bursting with curiosity and once again refined his microscope. This time, he increased the magnification strength to 2000 times. This was the limit. If he increased the strength any further, there would be visible signs of diffraction which would seriously impede his observations.

Link took a deep breath and stared through the microscope again.

This time, he got an extremely clear view of the runes. The rune circles were arranged in a manner that he could not comprehend. He could recognize a small part of the individual runes within the circles. However, much of it were runes that he had not seen in his life! There were also some indistinct shadows beneath the surface, suggesting that there were more layers to the stone.

"Unbelievable! This is unbelievable!" Link repeated the words countless times. After he became a Level-6 Magician, he thought that he already had a general understanding of magic in the World of Firuman. Even if it was something new, it could not possibly go too far away from this framework that he knew. However, this white stone had shown him a brand-new horizon, making his previous achievements seem extremely insignificant.

"My knowledge is merely a drop in the entire ocean!" Link could not help but exclaim. An unfathomable ocean of knowledge lay right in front of him in the form of a white stone.

At that moment, Link felt some lights flashing in his field of vision. It was the in-game system providing him with information.

It was the information of the white stone!

The Prophet White Stone (Uncharged)

Quality: Legendary

State: 0.1/100

Effect: When this object is fully charged, it could greatly enhance the power of a particular spell. The strength of the spell would increase by three levels.

Limitation 1: This object can only be used for three times.

Limitation 2: Only spells Level-6 and above can be enhanced.

(Note: The secrets of magic are endless.)

Link did not expect this to be a Legendary item. Furthermore, the effect of this item was simply insane. If he could enhance the strength of his spell by three levels, his Level-6 Titan's Hand could be directly strengthened to a Level-9 spell. He could then defeat Tarviss in just a single hit!

Link immediately became excited and even heaved a sigh of relief.

Although he had successfully mastered a Level-6 spell, the Titan's Hand after a month of insane practice, the continuous high intensity of magic research had left him burned out and even made him slightly tired and disgusted of magic. Many a times, he wanted to escape from the academy and his stash of magic books and live a life of relaxation.

If learning a Level-6 spell required this much effort, he would absolutely go insane if he tried to learn a Level-7 or Level-8 spell.

He only persevered because he knew of the imminent dangers.

However, he did not expect such a useful item to appear in front of him at such a crucial moment.

Who is the prophet of the High Elves? He seemed to know exactly what I needed. This stone could enhance a spell by three levels, a power just enough to defeat Tarviss.

Link was slightly curious but stopped thinking about it soon enough. He believed that the person harbored no hostility and when the time was ripe, he would naturally meet this Legendary person.

The imperative was then to charge up the white stone.

Link attempted to charge his mana into the stone. The stone immediately reacted to the inflow of mana and absorbed in like a sponge. It had an almost insatiable appetite for mana and at the same time, the glow surrounding it became slightly stronger.

Link continued charging the stone until he exhausted all 3000 Mana Points. The stone now glowed slightly brighter, much like the brightness of a firefly.

Link the observed the state of the white stone.

Prophet's White Stone (Uncharged)

State: 3/100

Link was horrified. This stone was a bottomless pit. It needed 1000 Mana Points to recover one state point!

On second thought, the stone had an incredible effect. It was only natural that the Mana Points requirement would be enormous. Link then accepted it without any issue.

Link's current Mana Recovery speed was 100 Mana Points per hour. His Maximum Mana was 2950 points as he had just become a Level-6 Magician. Compared to his Maximum Mana, his Mana recovery speed seemed to be lagging behind.

Use 100 Omni Points to increase Mana recovery speed, Link thought

A warm glow enveloped his body and after it dissipated, Link's Mana recovery speed had increased to 200 Mana Points per hour. He now needed less than a day to fully recover his Mana Points.

If Link used all his Mana Points in charging the Prophet's White Stone, he would be able to charge it fully in a months' time. By then, it would still be one month before the bloody April 15th.

Link took a long breath at this thought. Screw Tarviss, the Black Moon Conspiracy and screw the Dark Elves as well, I can finally rest.

Link put away the white stone and lay peacefully on his bed. Within a minute, he drifted quietly into the world of dreams.

The sleep was unusually blissful. In his dream, he met the Demon Princess Celine. She was smiling gently at him, causing his heart to flutter.

The next morning, Link recalled the dream with fervor. He then cast a concealing spell around him and took out his treasured black feather. The feather automatically floated after appearing in the air, with many translucent light balls swirling around it. It was exceptionally beautiful.

Link couldn't help but think about Celine. He seemed to see the playful and charming face right in front of him as he thought, Celine, I have already caught up to you.

He was now a Level-6 Magician and had a strong foundation in magic. He would no longer be a burden to Celine.

His only problem was that he had no idea where Celine was. After some thought, Link decided that he would track Celine down the moment he settled the issues in the academy and in his territory.

He had to tell her that she would be safe on his territory!

Link then put away the feather and washed up before heading down to the first-floor hall.

The hall was still crowded as usual. The only thing different was everyone's look of surprise when they saw Link. This had nothing to do with his achievements, but one that had something to do with the time. Link had been the first person to wake up and the last person to sleep in the entire Mage Tower for the past month. However, it was already 9 o'clock in the morning and he had just woken up. It was extremely peculiar.

"Master, are you free today?" Rylai walked up and asked timidly.

She had accumulated many questions over the past month. They were not terribly difficult questions and she could get her answers from any of the more experienced Magicians in the Mage Tower. However, she felt that their explanations were always vague and not as defined as Link's. She hence kept all the problems and decided to consult Link one day.

"Of course." Link felt slightly guilty. He had been too busy and had neglected his disciple. He patted Rylai's head gently and pointed to a table nearby. "Let's sit there."

Link then took Rylai's notes and started browsing through them. He then stared at his disciple with a somewhat surprised expression, "Have you started learning Hydrotherapy?"

Hydrotherapy

Level-1 Support spell

Effect: Creates a water bubble that contains a large amount of water elementals and air. When the target is within the water bubble, their recovery ability will increase significantly.

"Yes, but the structure is complex and I don't understand some parts of it." Rylai was unusually nervous. She felt that the intangible pressure from her master had become even stronger. She was afraid to even speak.

Link immediately sensed Rylai's apprehension and understood almost immediately. He had used 200 Omni Points consecutively and his strength had increased exponentially. This sudden increase in pressure was bound to scare Rylai.

Link started to contain his magic presence and concealed much of the pressure emitting from his body. He then looked at Rylai again and noticed that the tension on her face had largely dissipated.

Link had never learned Hydrotherapy. However, he had a good knowledge of magic and could understand this magic structure in one glance. He could also tell the exact places Rylai had doubts in. After thinking for a moment, he then began to answer them one-by-one.

Rylai listened intently to Link's teachings. Meanwhile, the Magician's Apprentices around them stared enviously at Rylai. She was one of the newest and youngest apprentices in the Mage Tower. To think that she would have the honor to be taught personally by a Level-4 Magician!

Even though Rylai had accumulated many questions, Link answered all of them within an hour. Following which, under the respectful gaze of Rylai, he began to formulate a study plan for her. At that moment, an apprentice walked towards them with a merchant behind him.

Link turned around and saw a familiar face—it was Warter.

Link had been enchanting equipment whenever he was tired of his magic research for the past month. He had almost used up all the materials he had and created nearly 20 pieces of Level-2 to Level-3 low-level magic equipment. His total profit was more than 20000 gold coins and the Green Leaf Merchant Firm's reputation had also soared. From the gleeful look on Warter's face, one could tell that he had also earned his fair share from this collaboration.

Warter greeted Link before saying, "Mr. Link, I am here to collect the equipment."

"Oh, right." Link was prepared. He handed over a necklace and a ring. Both of which were intricately crafted.

Warter carefully put them away into a wooden box. He then handed over a letter to Link. "I have a letter here. A lady I met had entrusted this to me."

Link felt strange and immediately opened the letter. A tight frown then appeared on his face. This was a letter from Eleanor and only contained one line of words. She wanted to meet him alone in Hot Springs City.

At first glance, Link thought that she was simply here for her magic bracelet. That would not be a problem as he had already crafted it. However, there was something amiss. The handwriting on the letter was extremely sloppy and there were even visible pauses in that line of words. This could only mean that the writer was not in a calm state of mind.

But Eleanor was a Level-6 Secret Magician. While she might not be able to maintain calm in all situations, what caused her to delve into such panic? She was either in great danger or was under pressure from someone to write the letter.

Many thoughts flashed through Link's mind. Finally, he decided to make a trip to Hot Springs City. After all, not much could instill such fear and panic into a Level-6 Magician.

He then stood up and told Rylai, "I am going out for a while. If Master Moira asks, tell her that I went to Hot Springs City."

"Alright." Rylai nodded.

"Mr. Link, I am also about to return to Hot Springs City. The carriage is pretty empty. Shall we go together?" Warter immediately offered.

"That would be great."

Chapter 173

The Demon's First Appearance

The weather in the Girvent Forest was nice and sunny that day and the rays of sunshine felt luxuriously warm and rejuvenating to bask in. Link was in Warter's carriage on his way to the capital as he listened to sweet birdsongs from both sides of the King's Lane. The pleasant sights and sounds outside the academy had relaxed him considerably from the anxiety he felt caused by Eleanor's urgent letter.

Link played with the wand in his hand out of boredom and soon enough his unsteady heart began to settle. He currently had two spells fixed with the Glyph of Soul and one powerful Level-6 spell, so even if he had to face a Level-6 Assassin he was confident that he could defeat him easily. Besides, they would be in Springs City and Link believed that the person who'd put panic in Eleanor's heart would be so brazen as to chase her right into the heart of the capital city.

It was quite a distance between East Cove and Springs City so after having calmed down considerably Link began to chat freely with Warter.

"Mr. Link, you wouldn't believe how popular your creations are in the capital," said Warter, wanting to strike up a conversation with Link as he noticed that Link was a bit quiet in the carriage. "Those noblemen who know nothing about magic are lining up to pay a fortune for them. They even sent their servants to wait at my door so they could be the first ones to buy your magic gear the moment I got them back to my shop."

"Are they really that popular?" asked Link with a laugh, visibly improving in his moods. "But if they didn't know magic and aren't fighters, then what do they buy my creations for?"

"To use them to woo their beloved ladies, I presume," replied Warter. "Your handcraft is as close to perfection as any ever existed. Did you know that people in the capital call you the Soaring Bird Master?"

Soaring Bird Master? Link wondered. Ah, it must've come from the signature I left on my creations. But what a vulgar name!

"Anyway, there are some customers who were genuine users of magic," continued Warter. "Some of them are Magicians, others are Warriors. They thought that although your handcraft is nothing short of exquisite, the spells are all of low levels. They would really like you to create some magic gear that was incorporated with higher-level spells. They'd be willing to pay for the materials themselves and have even given a specific price offer." Warter was the kind of person who would always come back to talking business no matter the time or occasion, as he did now when he brought up matters of business just as they were chatting casually.

Link considered it for a while and thought this was indeed a good deal.

"What price did they offer?" he asked.

"For Level-4 defensive gear such as shields and the like," began Warter earnestly, "they'd pay you 2000 gold coins for the enchantment work, not including the spending on materials. I could still haggle the price of course. Meanwhile, for attacking gear like swords and such, they'd be willing to pay 3300 gold coins...I don't think I could give you a detailed enough explanation verbally. Please give me a moment, I've prepared a list of specific orders for you."

Warter then slipped out a scroll and handed it to Link, who opened it up and was immediately startled at the list he was holding in his hands.

It was such a professionally prepared list. Not only did it distinguish the various types of equipment and weapons, but it was also neatly categorized by level and types of spells. There was even an extra charge for modifications by Supreme Magical Skills and an order for the creation of a wand.

For a Level-4 wand of fine quality modified with Supreme Magical Skills to give it an attacking boost, the price would be 5000 gold coins. If its quality was epic, the price would be increased to 8000 gold coins. Plus, Link wouldn't have to pay a single copper for the costs of materials.

What an unbelievably good deal!

Link wasn't so naive, though. After perusing the list, he turned to Warter with a laugh.

"That is a well thought out list! It's only been a month, how did you run into so many potential buyers?" With such a comprehensive list Link wouldn't believe that Warter hadn't made any extra effort in drawing in new customers himself.

Warter chuckled nervously at Link's question and came clean right away. He was only an ordinary man, after all, he wouldn't dare to lie through his teeth to a Master Magician like Link.

"I did pull some strings myself," he confessed. "I would get some benefits from these deals as well...about 100 gold coins for every order..."

100 gold coins, so that was what Warter got for making these deals for Link. It was nothing compared to what Link made from his magic gear, but it was still a massive amount of gold coins for the average merchant.

Warter didn't know that was how Link felt, though. He spoke very timidly in fear of Link's disapproval.

But he was wrong in that regard about Link. Although he was a Magician, Link wasn't completely ignorant of how businesses were run. He knew and appreciated Warter's help in doing the legwork for him in getting him such serious buyers which had saved so much of Link's energy. Link felt that Warter had earned every copper of those 100 gold coins. He also realized that their cooperation would only flourish and expand if both of them made profits from it.

"I like this plan, it's an excellent plan. We'll go with it," said Link. "You'll prepare a list just like this for me from now on, but don't take too many orders. I can only handle three per month, and no spells above Level-5."

"That is not a problem at all!" said Warter, relieved and overjoyed. "I'll prepare a list for you every month, then." Three pieces of magic gear per month, that would make him 300 gold coins richer each month! It wasn't all that much, to be frank, but this cooperation with Link would greatly expand the reputation of his merchant firm which was his aim after all. He'd already felt this benefit after only slightly more than a month of cooperation with Link.

Meanwhile, Link began to consider expanding his production scale of magic gear. He couldn't possibly do that alone, of course, so must now find a helper.

The best helper would be a Magician's Apprentice, Link mused. But right now, there's only Rylai. I wouldn't waste her talents on such a menial job, though. Besides, I don't have my own Mage Tower yet, and my collection of magic textbooks is still too small, so I wouldn't attract any gifted apprentices to be my disciple...Now that the building

of my estate has started, it's time to think about building my own Mage Tower as well...

Link was now a full-fledged Level-6 Master Magician and had more than 60,000 gold coins in his pocket, so the time was ripe for him to consider building his own Mage Tower and start receiving his own Magician's Apprentices now.

After discussing business matters, Link and Warter went back to chatting casually along the way to Springs City. The topic they lingered on the most was none other than the war in the North, or rather, Warter was the one speaking while Link listened to him intently.

Warter was a well-informed merchant who kept up with the latest updates about the war in the North. He could recount the developments on the battlefields with baffling details.

"Overall, things are looking good for our side at the moment," said Warter. "It seems that our army could always accurately guess the enemy's next moves and attack them accordingly. I must say that the MI3 is doing a particularly good job, they seem to have outplayed their counterpart, the Death's Hand, by the looks of it! I'm sure we can chase the Dark Elves back under ground where they came from soon enough!"

Link listened then laughed quietly at this report. He knew that the cypher scroll he'd discovered had more or less aided in the successes of the army.

Warter, on the other hand, shone with excitement and pride of his kingdom's apparent victories. He was very optimistic in his predictions of the war's future outcomes. Link himself heartily hoped that such a situation would continue until the final and decisive victory was achieved.

Time passed quickly during the chat. Without them realizing it, several hours had passed and the massive walls of Springs City already loomed in the distance.

Even though there had been a tragedy on Jade Street not too long ago, the authorities had handled the situation very well, and everything was repaired swiftly afterwards. This, coupled with the continuing victories reported from the battlefields in the North, had helped the populace of the city recover from the shocks of the tragedy and move on with their lives.

They did more than move on, though. Link had heard people talking optimistically of the war in the North all along the way from the academy to the capital city. There was

even a premature festive atmosphere in the air where people danced and celebrated the future victory of the Norton Kingdom and the seemingly assured demise of the Dark Elves.

Link looked on with slight worry at this blatant and irrational optimism of the people in Springs City. It just struck him the wrong way and made him feel more anxious at the hubris the people were showing.

Still, he had no intention to rain on their parades, so all he did was look on in silence while the town folks carried on in their merry ways.

Soon, the carriage had reached the Blue Hermit Inn of the Magician's District where he was to meet up with Eleanor. Link put on his hooded cape and covered his face with the hood, then he bid farewell to Warter and climbed out of the carriage.

Link didn't enter the inn straight away, though. He cast a detection magic and checked for any suspicious auras within the range of 300 feet around the inn. Only when he was sure that it was safe then he walked into the inn through its front entrance.

"I am looking for a lady by the name of Eleanor," he said in a low, deep voice when approached the innkeeper at the counter inside. "May I know which room she's staying in?"

The innkeeper was accustomed to people with Link's attire because that was how Magicians liked to dress anyway, so he took notice of it.

"Miss Eleanor is indeed staying here," he answered, "but I will have to ask you a question before I am allowed to tell you her room number."

The Blue Hermit Inn was famous for its strict safety protection measures for its guests. This must be the reason why Eleanor had chosen this place to stay in. Link estimated that Eleanor had instructed the innkeeper to ask him a question that Link would know the answer to.

"Go ahead," said Link.

"Which bracelet is Miss Eleanor's favorite?" asked the innkeeper.

"The Phoenix bracelet," answered Link without having to think about it.

"That is correct," said the innkeeper with a nod. "Her room number is 350, it's at the end of the corridor on the third floor. If I am not mistaken she hasn't left the room yet today."

So Link went up to the third floor and found the room with the number that the innkeeper had informed him of. Link hid behind the stone wall outside the room and reached out his hand to knock gently on the door, just in case someone inside might attack him as he was standing there waiting to be let in. The possibility that this might actually happen was slim, but someone who was able to terrify a Level-6 Magician like Eleanor must be formidable indeed, so it wouldn't hurt to take every precaution he possibly could.

"Who is it?!" said a familiar voice from the inside of the room. It was definitely Eleanor.

"It's me, Link," he answered. "Are you safe now?"

The moment his last word was uttered, the door opened with a click. Eleanor emerged from behind the door, her face was a picture of terror and trepidation at first, but once she discovered that Link really was there she calmed down gradually.

"Oh, thank the Lord of Light!" she exclaimed. "You're finally here! Come in!"

Link nodded and followed Eleanor into the room. He was still on full guard, though.

"What happened exactly?" he asked the moment they settled down in the sitting room.

"I was hunted down by a horrifying black shadow," answered Eleanor, still slightly trembling in fear as she talked about it. "If it hadn't been for the Phoenix bracelet, I would've died in the middle of the Girvent Forest. That's why I'm taking refuge here in the capital city. I don't think that...thing...would dare to follow me into Springs City."

Eleanor's expressions as she recounted her experience made Link feel the fear she still felt even right now of the opponent she had faced in the Girvent Forest.

"Tell me more details about what happened," said Link.

"Sure," nodded Eleanor. "The last time we parted ways, I went into the Girvent Forest and stayed there. Nothing happened for a while until about a month ago, when suddenly I sensed the presence of a strange soul. I was curious, so I followed the scent until I found it. I saw that soul enter the body of a dead young woman, bringing her

back to life! I've never seen this kind of magic before and I didn't know how it happened, so I kept following her to find out. On the third day, I saw that reborn young woman meeting secretly with a black shadow. The shadow thing was very perceptive, the moment I made a slight noise it instantly detected my presence and hunted me down. None of my magic had any effect on it, so I persisted until it let its guard down a little and attacked it with the Flame Blast in the Phoenix bracelet. That worked on it alright! It was almost blown off into the distance! I think it was quite seriously injured, so I quickly ran here to escape from it. I could still feel, though, that it was still lurking somewhere in the darkness waiting for me. I'm sure that the moment I leave this city I will be toast!"

"You mean it could resist your spells?" asked Link in surprise. "What did you mean by a black shadow? You referred to it by the word 'it', does that mean that you don't think it's human?"

"It was definitely not human," answered Eleanor. "I don't know what it was, but it had red eyes and a black knife-like protrusion on its arm – my head was nearly cut off by that thing!"

As she spoke, Eleanor lifted her chin to show the cut wound that mysterious ghoul had left on her skin. Link examined it and saw a very deep cut with a very strange bloodstain surrounded by black web-like scars around it. It was a truly ghastly sight.

Eleanor seemed to be in pain just by this slight movement of raising her chin as her tears began to roll soon after Link examined it. Eleanor didn't understand why but she had become so fragile in front of Link and was ashamed of herself for crying over such a small matter.

"The wound hurts really bad, and it's full of dark elements," she said. "The elements seem to be alive in its own way. I should probably go to the priests and let them have a look at it, but you know that would cause some problems because of who I am. I've tried washing it with holy water but the wound hasn't recovered one bit in three days—it's even gotten worse instead."

Link started to examine the wound even more closely now with a detection spell. Under the light of the spell, Link could clearly see the dark auras emanating from the wound. It seemed to have felt threatened by Link's spell and recoiled even deeper into Eleanor's skin. This made Eleanor shriek loudly in pain.

The pain must really be unbearable to cause this powerful Master Magician to cry out in such a manner. In Link's mind, there was only one thing that could cause Eleanor such harm.

"I'm afraid you've been attacked by a demon," said Link as he sat down. "Not just any demon, though, but a pureblood demon from the abyss."

"What?!" screeched Eleanor in utter shock. "But aren't demon creatures of a different realm of existence?" Eleanor's face was completely drained of color now.

Chapter 174

Sacred Silver

The races who worshipped the God of Light in the World of Firuman had a term for all dark creatures who hailed from the abyss. They were collectively termed as demons.

Just as how there were many races in the World of Firuman, there were also different kinds of demons in the abyss varying in strength. Not all demons were as strong as Tarviss or the Lord of the Deep, Nozama.

However, there was still no denying that demons possessed combat capabilities way above that of the races in Firuman. This applied to every single demon, more specifically, it was termed the "Abyssal Attribute".

In most cases, it would be difficult for a Firuman race to defeat a demon if they were of the same level of strength.

In the room of the Blue Hermit, Eleanor's face sank upon hearing that she had encountered a pure-blooded demon. She panicked and said with the tears rolling down her face, "I've heard that it is impossible to dispel the demonic forces and the victim will be continuously eroded by it till they become a demonic puppet. What do I do now?"

Eleanor was speaking the truth. If she did not find Link in time, the situation might have been unsalvageable. At this point in the timeline, demons had not begun their large-scale invasion into the World of Firuman. People hence had no idea how to deal with damage and wounds caused by demons. Usually, those who were corroded by demonic forces were met with tragic deaths.

In the game, players could often see an entire village of demonic puppets caused solely by the corrosion from the demonic forces.

This situation continued until a brilliant bishop named Diego Benson discovered a strange metal that could restrain the powers of the demonic forces.

This strange metal could not be found naturally. It was created synthetically and was

called Sacred Silver.

Sacred Silver

The general term for all holy metals.

Effect: The flawless product from the fusion of silver metal and the power of light. Has the ability to restrain demonic forces.

(Note: The higher the quality of the metal, the better the effect of the Sacred Silver.)

What were silver metals? Normal silver and Thorium could all be considered under the umbrella term, silver metals. After one processed them using some secret techniques, they would then become Sacred Silver.

If Eleanor had been injured a month ago, Link would have been clueless on how to dispel the demonic forces. Although he knew that Sacred Silver worked wonders in restraining demonic forces, he had no idea how to refine them.

However, in the past month, he had been researching on methods to help him gain an advantage over Tarviss. Naturally, he would also have taken time to research on Sacred Silver. Coupled with the help of Anthony's extensive library of magic books, he had successfully made his first batch of Sacred Silver.

Upon seeing Eleanor's pitiful expression, he then comforted, "Don't worry, I can cure you."

"Really?" Eleanor was elated. She would have treated those words with suspicion if anyone else had said them. However, Link was different.

"Rest assured that you'll be alright," Link said once again with confidence. He then took out the bracelet that he promised to craft for Eleanor previously and handed it over. "Here, the bracelet that I promised. It contains a Level-4 Edelweiss spell that I recently modified."

Link put in a lot of effort into this bracelet. Under the stressful circumstances of learning a Level-6 spell, he still took half an hour every day and half a month in total to complete the product.

The body of the bracelet was made of pure gold, while 80% of the runes were made

from ordinary Thorium. The remaining 20% were made from the extremely precious Fire Star Thorium.

The bracelet also had an intricate design. The bracelet was in the shape of a dragon with its wings tucked in. This dragon had a slender and long body instead of the giant and bulky ones people were used to. It was somewhat similar to an oriental dragon. The runes carved onto the bracelet were mostly silver in color and contrasted well with the dark gold main body of the bracelet, making them shine like the dragon's scales. One could also see crimson hues being reflected off the bracelet due to the runes made from Fire Star Thorium.

As the effect of Fire Star Thorium was extremely strong, the bracelet emitted a light crimson hue that sparkled with silver brilliance. One look at the bracelet was all someone needed to determine its quality.

Eleanor's attention was immediately captured by it and she seemed to have momentarily forgotten about the pain from her wounds. She took the bracelet and observed it carefully. Upon seeing the Fire Star Thorium, she gasped, surprised at Link's generosity.

"What is it called?" Eleanor could not help but ask. She would not name it herself this time. Such a work of art should only be named by its creator.

"Since you have one that is called the Phoenix Bracelet, let's name this the Dragon Bracelet," Link laughed.

In his eyes, the bracelet had these statistics.

Dragon Bracelet

Quality: Epic

Effect: Contains the Level-4 Defensive spell Crimson Edelweiss. Able to defend against both magical and physical damage. At the same time, the burning forcefield generated can damage enemies that come within a 15-foot radius of the user. The offensive power of the flames is Level-4 in strength.

(Note: Link's gift)

Eleanor was in love with the bracelet. She immediately wore it on her arm and

concentrated her mana into the bracelet. When the Edelweiss spell was activated, a translucent crimson circle surrounded her body.

As the crimson circle began to increase in size, it came into contact with a desk on its side. Upon collision, the crimson circle burned through the desk without any resistance, leaving a huge circular gap in its wake. There were also sparks generated from the process and in an instant, the entire desk was burned to ashes.

Eleanor kept silent as she observed the full power of the defensive spell. After which, she exclaimed, "Link, your enchanting magic is just extraordinary, this is close to a miracle!"

This was the first time she saw anything like this after living for a century.

Link smiled with not a hint of complacency. After seeing the complexity of the Prophet's White Stone, the pride that he had generated ever since he stepped into the World of Firuman was completely shattered.

He said, "We need to treat your injury immediately. I'll purchase the ingredients needed for the treatment. Be back in a while."

"Oh, how long will it take?" Eleanor's attention shifted from the bracelet immediately.

"Around one to two hours."

"One or two hours?" Eleanor was persistent.

Link felt that it was a strange question and something unbecoming of a Master Magician. However, considering that she was afflicted with what would be deemed a mortal injury, he patiently replied, "I will try my best to come back earlier. No promises though."

"Alright then. Please be quick." Eleanor nodded reluctantly.

Link then left the room. Almost immediately after the door closed, Eleanor began to look forward to Link's knock on the door.

That was of course, impossible. She then pranced around in the room, flipped through a few pages of a magic book before throwing it to the side and staring out of the window. She hoped to see Link in the crowd, but alas, she was unsuccessful.

Overwhelmed by disappointment, Eleanor sat down on her chair again and different scenarios flashed through her mind. On one hand, she was afraid that Link might have lied and left her alone, defenseless and injured. On the other hand, she was also afraid that Link might encounter the demon or even get knocked down by a carriage along the way.

All kinds of strange ideas began popping out of her head, causing her to feel extremely uneasy. In the entire Hot Springs City, Link was the only person she trusted.

After what seemed like an eternity, she heard a knocking on the door. Link's voice echoed through the room, "I am back."

Eleanor heaved a sigh of relief and rushed for the door.

"How was it?" She asked.

"It went very well." Link shook the bags of ingredients in his hands. They were a bottle of scared water, a piece of silver and many different bottles of strange liquids respectively.

Link then placed the items on the desk and started mixing them together while explaining to Eleanor the principal behind Sacred Silver.

"Sacred water contains the power of light, the nemesis of all demonic forces. However, scared water has its limitations. The power of light will be greatly diminished by the soft and gentle properties of the water elements. It would thus be futile if you applied sacred water directly onto the wounds."

Link then poured the sacred water into a huge cup and submerged the silver into the solution. He then poured a bottle of blue liquid into the cup which caused the entire solution to boil. Before long, the silver was melting at a speed visible to the naked eye.

"Is this blue liquid a solution that decomposes metallic substances?" Eleanor was after all, a Magician with some background in enchanting magic.

"Yes, it's role is to break down the silver particles into gold particles. However, that alone is not enough." Link then poured a few other bottles of liquid into the cup and started shaking them.

As the cup moved, the solution inside the cup started changing. After around ten

minutes, the liquid had divided into two clear layers. The upper layer was a clear and transparent liquid like ordinary water. The lower layer was a silver viscous liquid similar to mercury.

Link cast the Magician's Hand and carefully extracted the upper layer of clear water, leaving only the viscous silver liquid in the cup. Upon closer inspection, one could see a faint glow being emitted from the liquid, exuding a cold and sacred presence.

"This is Sacred Silver, the fusion of the power of light and silver metal. Borrowing the sharp characteristics of the gold element, the power of light within the sacred water can be heightened to its limits."

As Link spoke. He cast the Higgs field spell and fished the ball of viscous silver liquid out of the cup. He then began to shape the liquid until it became the shape of a scalpel before hardening it. The liquid had then transformed into a little silver knife shining with brilliance.

"Here, lie on the chair while I treat your wounds. It will be slightly painful, please endure it."

"Alright." Eleanor had complete faith in Link. She sat on the chair and lifted her chin, exposing the horrible wound on her neck.

Link then used the Magician's Hand to control the Sacred Silver knife and cut off the dead flesh surrounding the wound piece by piece. This process was extremely painful, especially when the power of light on the knife clashed with the demonic forces in the wounds. As the knife made contact with the wound, sizzling sounds could be heard and green smoke would emerge. It was a terrible scene.

Eleanor gritted her teeth as she stayed motionless. Tears started flowing out from her beautiful pair of eyes.

It took Link over 30 cuts before he removed the corroded flesh from the wounds. Now that the demonic forces had been completely dispelled, he then put away the knife and asked, "How do you feel?"

"There is this burning sensation. However, the numb feeling is already gone," Eleanor said. She knew that this meant the demonic forces had completely been dispelled.

"That sounds great." Link then took out a bottle of clear sacred water and used the

Magician's Hand to create a ball of water. He then used it to gently rub Eleanor's wound until the blood and dirt were completely removed before bandaging the wound with a clean white towel.

Eleanor heaved a sigh of relief after all was done. She wiped her tears and said in an embarrassing tone, "I have cried more today than in my entire life. It was really painful."

Link then put away his tools and laughed, "I have heard that women are made of water. I used to not believe it, but maybe now I do."

"Tsk. You are still young, don't talk like an adult." Eleanor glanced at Link in displeasure.

Link shrugged his shoulders and stayed silent. He did not want to continue the subject and said, "You mentioned that a soul was reborn using a corpse in the Girvent Forest around a month ago. Can you bring me to the village?"

The moment he asked the question, Link felt a flash of light in his field of vision. It was the previous task that required him to investigate the details of the Black Moon Conspiracy.

This was an obvious clue. The soul that was resurrected was related to the Black Moon Conspiracy!

"There might be a demon outside of town..."

"I have the Sacred Silver. Furthermore, my fire elemental magic is extremely effective in restraining these abyssal creatures." Link was never afraid of demons. No matter how strong they were, they would still be burned to ashes under the wrath of his flames.

"Alright then. I'll take you there. The person made me so miserable, I need my revenge!" Eleanor said with vengeance.

Chapter 175

The First Confrontation with the Demon

Link and Eleanor did not rush out of the capital city the moment Eleanor's wound had been treated. Instead, they stayed in the Blue Hermit Inn and rested there for another day.

In the meantime, they both discussed matters of magic with each other. Eleanor's profound insights in secret spells helped Link gain new knowledge and perspective, while Link's own expertise and creativity in his use of elemental spells surprised Eleanor as well.

Then, on the second day, with the help of the holy water, the cut wound on Eleanor's neck had basically closed, while Link's own Mana had recovered to its fullest state. At the same time, he'd also refined and created three more pounds of Sacred Silver, albeit using ordinary silver instead of Mithril this time. This kind of Sacred Silver might not be as good as those made of Mithril, but it was still effective enough against the power of demons.

Once everything was ready, Link found them a carriage and off they went out of Springs City.

Then, on their way in the carriage, Eleanor suddenly thought of something.

"They called that young woman in the village Lisa," she said, "but that's not the woman's real name. I think the demon called her Elena."

"What did you say?!" asked Link, startled by this revelation.

"Well, it sounded something like that, though the demon's voice wasn't clear," said Eleanor. "It could be Lena or Aina...I was too far away anyway, so I couldn't hear them well enough."

Link sunk into silence for a while, apparently brooding over the newly gained information.

"Do you remember the exact dates of the day you noticed the soul, Ellie?" asked Link.

"Of course I do! My memory isn't so bad despite my age!" answered Eleanor. "It was about...28 days ago, so it must be January...14th." Unbeknownst to her, Eleanor had just mentioned the date that sent a cold shiver down Link's spine.

January 14 was the day when he accidentally killed Elena.

"Do you remember the exact time you noticed it?" Link asked more eagerly now.

"Was it in the morning or the afternoon? What time was it?"

"It must've been about three in the afternoon," answered Eleanor.

Link took a deep breath then let out a long sigh after hearing Eleanor's answer. It was just as he expected now. He had destroyed Elena's body that day, but her soul had survived and escaped, then found a new body and was reborn again. And now that she was reborn she even managed to contact a demon. By the looks of it, although Link wasn't sure exactly how she did it, he knew that Elena must've taken the detailed plans of the inner layout of the Mage Towers in the East Cove Magic Academy with her.

The puzzle pieces had formed into a complete picture now. The nagging suspicion Link had felt all along was also confirmed.

"What a sly, devious and malicious woman!" cursed Link before taking in another deep breath. He had gone through the massacre in Gladstone, he'd killed countless robbers and even some Dark Elves with his own hands, yet he still shuddered at the thought of facing such a crafty opponent as Elena.

He felt the most sympathy for his friend Eliard right now. He had been used and manipulated by the woman. Not only was his heart and spirits broken, he'd even thought of giving up magic because of her!

By then, the carriage had already reached the gates of the capital city and was about to leave its safety. Link and Eleanor then got out of the carriage, paid for the fare and continued their journey on foot.

There were still many people passing by on the King's Lane since they were still so near to the capital city gates, so the demon hadn't appeared yet even though Eleanor had begun to feel its presence now.

"I'd faced it directly before, so I know the scent of its soul," said Eleanor. "He's definitely lurking behind the trees of the forest near us, staring, waiting for the right time to pounce on me." Eleanor then looked out into the forest beside the road and could distinctly feel a sharp sense of danger. The memory of the confrontation three days earlier was still fresh in her mind and it filled her whole being with fear.

Link nodded at Eleanor's words, but he felt no real threat from this demon at all, and the reason was simple—if Eleanor could injure him even by using the weakened version of the Flame Blast in the Phoenix bracelet, then this demon was simply no match for him.

They both walked on for another couple of miles along King's Lane. It was then ten in the morning. It's a pity that on that day the sun was blocked by a sky of thick clouds, so it was impossible for Link to use the sunlight to weaken the demon's power.

By then, even Link could feel the anomalous aura in the surrounding. It felt distinct, as if a pair of eyes in the darkness were following him around fixedly.

"It doesn't even bother to hide its own scent!" exclaimed Eleanor. "I wonder if that's out of arrogance or ignorance?" Eleanor turned to Link for his opinion. If he knew how to use the Sacred Silver to cure her wound, then he must know more about demons than she did.

Eleanor wasn't disappointed then, when Link answered her confidently.

"It's neither arrogance nor ignorance," he said. "It just thought that there was no need for it."

"What does that mean?" asked Eleanor, slightly confused.

"The abyss where the demons come from is a jungle world where you either kill or get killed. To survive there, you must bare your fangs and show off your strength as much as possible to intimidate other people and discourage them from attacking you. This demon must've thought that everyone here was weaker than it, so it felt no need to hide its presence. My guess is that it thought it was the king in this jungle."

"Oh, so they're just like wild beasts!" Eleanor finally found a suitable metaphor to describe the demons.

Link nodded in agreement. There was more about the demons that he hadn't told

Eleanor, of course. For example, he knew that demons were divided into two categories—the high-level demons and the low-level demons.

The low-level demons have lower intelligence, their nature was closer to a wild beast—their combat tactics were more instinctive rather than rational and strategic, and their strengths overall weren't all that terrifying. As for high-level demons, well... to put it simply, 99% of the horrifying demons in the legends told from generations to generations in Firuman were high-level demons!

Judging from the current situation, the demon in the Girvent Forest seemed to be a low-level demon. Although it would be foolish to underestimate its strength, Link felt that he didn't have much to fear from this beast. An average professional fighter might not be able to defeat it, but if it was a joint attack by three fighters and above then the demon would surely not be able to survive.

For one thing, though, the demon still showed some restraint as it did not attack them when they were still in broad daylight and in the midst of a crowd on the King's Lane earlier. This meant that it was afraid of being discovered for some reason, causing him to stalk them in the darkness all this while without making any moves to attack them.

Finally, Link and Eleanor reached a place isolated enough that no one was around or likely to pass by.

"Let's go into the forest," said Link. There was no point in circling around avoiding the demon forever. Their best chance was to deal with the demon head-on.

"Understood," answered Eleanor with a nod. She moved instinctively closer to Link as they entered the forest as it somehow made her feel safer.

They both plodded through the Girvent Forest for another quarter of a mile before they heard the sound of footsteps and snapped branches. Then a mighty beast sprung towards them out of the blue at an unimaginably high speed.

They were facing a demon after all, so Link didn't dare to take its attacks lightly. He rushed forward to a spot where the vegetation was relatively sparse and shouted to Eleanor, "Activate the Guarding Barrier!"

As soon as he finished the sentence Link's body was shrouded in the Crimson Edelweiss, while Eleanor had also activated her dragon bracelet. Thus, they were now both enveloped in a translucent bubble that glowed faintly in red.

Just then, a tall black figure burst out towards them from the dark forest. This figure was humanoid, although it was about seven feet tall and its skin was as black as ink.

At this moment, a tall black figure burst out in the forest.

This figure was humanoid and taller than seven feet. The surface of its body was dark with no pores. There were countless strange dark green runes on its skin, while on the outside of its arms there was a knife-like protrusion that seemed to be shrouded in a cold aura.

As soon as it rushed towards them, its red eyes shifted between Link and Eleanor, then it seemed to have recognized Eleanor and identified her as its target. Eleanor immediately stretched out her wrist and pointed it at the demon.

"Flame Blast!" she shouted.

This was the only spell she knew that had an effect on the demon. With a loud boom, a fan-shaped high-temperature flame then surged forward towards the demon.

However, this demon seemed to have remembered this trick by Eleanor, so the moment Eleanor raised her arms, it immediately dodged to the side at a phenomenal speed and escaped from the attack.

"Did you think I'd fall for that twice?" said the demon in a strange, unclear voice. Even as it spoke, its speed had not slowed down one bit. It then jerked its legs and shot towards Eleanor, at the same time stretching the blade-like protrusion on its arm towards her.

This time, the demon wouldn't fall for the same trick again. With one stroke, the demon would cut off her head!

Eleanor was too late in triggering the second Flame Blast, but she still didn't hide or dodge away from the demon. Firstly, because she still had a defensive shield around her, and secondly, because she knew that Link was right beside her.

The demon didn't take any notice of the young man beside Eleanor at all. What could such a small fry do to a demon anyway? The demon quickly closed in on Eleanor and was now only about thirty feet away from her. At that point, he let out a roar and leaped up into the air.

In its expectation, its violent strike would surely crush through the woman's magic shield, which would then leave her completely vulnerable to his arm blade attack. The woman's head would be off her shoulder soon enough, then no one would ever know the secret between it and the holy maiden.

As for the young Magician who was with her, he would just have to take the hit of maybe one or two of the boy's spells. But that wouldn't matter at all, because his skin was highly resistant to magic, so at most, the spells would just leave him some scratches.

Oh, how wrong the demon had been!

Just at the moment when he leaped up, a giant hand with rings of red-hot fire grabbed him and held him mid-air, rendering him completely unable to move.

It was a spell Link had cast with his Glyph of Soul—the Vulcan's Hand.

"Ahhhhh!!!" The demon was completely caught off guard. It then unleashed an explosive amount of energy in its attempt to escape the fiery hand's clutch. The explosive energy came out as a powerful burst of black aura which was so mighty that it managed to scatter the fire elements of the Vulcan's Hand!

Demons naturally had very strong battle force and their reaction was incredibly speedy. That was why Link didn't use the high-temperature version of the Vulcan's Hand.

Not bad, thought Link. This demon could withstand the power of a Level-5 spell, and the dark energy inside it is quite strong as well! A demon's dark energy was almost bottomless and could never be depleted like a Magician's Mana. This was the reason why demons were the most formidable foe a Magician could ever face!

Although the Vulcan's Hand had now scattered, the demon didn't rush forward even though he'd escaped from the giant hand's grasp. Once its feet reached the ground the demon swiftly dodged sideways to avoid Eleanor's second Flame Blast.

The scorching flames licked the demon's skin, but it seemed to have made no harm to it at all. This was thanks to the demon's excellent instinct, as it quickly unleashed a burst of dark energy right before the Flame Blast hit it, otherwise its skin would surely have been crisp.

The fact that it was able to escape unscathed from Link and Eleanor's joint attacks meant that this demon would be one of the most powerful and formidable fighters in Firuman.

"Ha! This trick again? Pathetic!" Then, demon once again lunged towards Eleanor.

Then it was like a replay of the previous scene, as just when he moved forward another giant fiery hand caught it and held it in the air just as before. The demon's limbs grappled the air as it struggled to get away, it now looked just like a kitten that was held in a hand.

"I'll make you scatter again, stupid hand!" After getting attacked twice by the same method the demon erupted in anger. It bellowed as it unleashed another explosion of dark energy, this time its scream seemed to ring through the whole forest. Once again it managed to disperse the Vulcan's Hand, but this time he could sense the moment his feet reached the ground that something was shooting towards it from behind. It was a Whistle. Not the normal Whistle though, but a Sacred Silver Whistle!

"So, you're finally trying a new trick, huh?" jeered the demon.

The demon immediately felt the threat coming from behind and blocked the Whistle just in time with its arm blades.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Because of its strong combat instincts, the demon blocked all of Link's Whistles with frightening precision and speed. But that wasn't all the Whistles could do.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The Whistles exploded and sent fragments of Sacred Silver flying through the air. The flames from the explosions seemed to have swallowed up the demon's whole body.

But Whistle was ultimately just a Level-1 spell, so even though the metal fragments were quite deadly to humans and Dark Elves who had very low defenses, they were really no threat to the demons who had very strong and hardy skin.

All the demon felt when the metal fragments hit it was a slight prickly pain. It bent his head to examine its skin for a while and noticed that there were some shallow wounds, but that was nothing to get worried about. What was scary was how these cut wounds

couldn't close up and how the dark energy around its body was slightly hampered and impeded now.

Those were the effects of the Sacred Silver.

The demon was momentarily stunned. It had never been attacked by anything like this before.

Just at that moment, Link triggered the Glyph of Soul and the Vulcan's Hand that had just dispersed re-emerged and once again clutched the demon's body in its palm.

"Ellie," shouted Link, "the Sacred Silver Whistle!"

Eleanor had mastered Whistle ever since Link had given her the scroll that contained its spell structure at the Magicians' Fair a while ago.

Eleanor was no longer afraid of the demon when she saw it clambering helplessly in Link's giant fiery hand. Her attitude and performance at the time were finally at the standard of a Level-6 Master Magician.

Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!

One-by-one, the Whistles shot out of Eleanor's wand at a speed on par with Link's Whistles. She'd cast three Whistles in one second, and under her control they all headed towards the demon's head.

Bang, bang, bang!

The Whistles exploded, bringing about more Sacred Silver fragments all around the demon.

The strange attack had just wounded the demon not too long ago, so when it was hit with the same attack again the demon got even more confused. It had never faced this kind of spell before and had no idea how to defend itself from it. All this time his instincts had helped him win every battle, but once he's forced to face a novel attack the demon was stumped. With this dampened response it was then unable to disperse Link's Vulcan's Hand.

Which meant it was the perfect timing for Link to kill the demon!

A steady whistle rang out of the Vulcan's hand. It tightened its grasp on the demon abruptly, while its palm suddenly burst out in an intense bluish-white light—it was the fire elements of the Vulcan's Hand finally breaking out into its wild nature!

"Aaaaahhhhh!!!" the demon howled in pain. There was an explosion of the dark demonic energy around it again, protecting it from the screaming heat of the fiery hand. But by then, the Vulcan's Hand had already fully exploded and released an immense implosive force that pushed inwards at the demon, canceling out the outward pushing forces the dark energy had exerted on the Vulcan's Hand.

And so, the demon could no longer disperse the Vulcan's Hand this time, it could only resist its force.

However, although the dark energy in its body was immense, it still had its limits. The demon had already used a significant amount of energy in scattering the Vulcan's Hand twice and was now continuously exerting energy to protect himself from the Vulcan's Hand's force. It had already expended a great chunk of its energy reserve.

Finally, after ten seconds in the grasp of the Vulcan's Hand, the demon had emptied its dark energy. The flame then began to burn his body directly, and clouds of blue smoke billowed out. The scream in its throat then began to change its pitch and became so inhuman that it would curdle the blood of anyone who heard it.

The burning continued for another three seconds while the demon continued to scream. Just then, Link halted the Vulcan's Hand.

Thump!

A charred body covered with blue smoke slumped to the ground. The demon's skin was completely burned, and its raw flesh and blood were exposed. Surprisingly, the demon could still move. It squirmed on the ground, still attempting to escape, and its speed was increasing gradually.

Even its injuries were recovering in front of Link and Eleanor's eyes! What a tenacious will to live!

Unfortunately, though, its time had come.

Swish swish swish swish.

Link cast four Sacred Silver Whistles towards the demon and they quickly pierced through its hand and both its legs. Then the Whistles exploded simultaneously, nailing the demon to the ground.

The Sacred Silver in these four Whistles were refined from Mithril, so the effects on the demon were much stronger than the previous ones, enough to overpower the demon's defenses and pierce deep into the demon's body. Once the Sacred Silver made contact with the demon's blood, it would then suppress the dark energy inside its body.

This time, the demon would have no choice but be honest and spill out everything he knew.

Chapter 176

The Pillar of the Dark Elves

Demons were creatures from another dimension. They would not simply appear in Firuman out of thin air. Someone must have opened a portal to the abyss and summoned them.

Where was the location of the portal? Who was the summoner? These were the things Link wanted to know.

After casting an unmodified Edelweiss spell onto himself, Link walked towards the demon and raised his wand. A Sacred Whistle appeared at the tip of his wand. The whistle spun at a high speed and released a piercing screech through the atmosphere. Visible air ripples could be seen around it. Link positioned it only around two feet away from the demon. As long as Link release the spell, the Sacred Whistle would pierce into the demon's skull and deal a fatal blow.

The demon was evidently becoming nervous. His bloodshot eyes stared at the whistle defensively.

Link stared silently at the demon with a smile on his face. He was familiar with the temperament of demons. When they were in good health and at the peak of their strength, they would be arrogant and explosive. However, when they lost all these advantages, they would not hesitate to abandon their pride and integrity to beg for mercy.

Survival of the fittest was the way of life in the environment they were brought up in. Anything else was secondary as long as they could stay alive. This was especially true for low-level demons. In the abyss, they were often bullied and repressed by the stronger high-level demons. Their pride had long been trampled on and destroyed.

After ten seconds, the demon could not maintain his composure anymore. He screamed, "I surrender...I surrender!"

Link had a look of satisfaction while Eleanor stared at him with a puzzling expression. She did not expect the wild ferocious demon they had just fought would say such

cowardly words.

Link kept the scared whistle spell on hold and asked, "Who is your summoner?"

"Aymons de Romilson. He is a Magician like both of you. He is Level-7 in strength.

"What about the location?"

"The Horton Tower to the North. In the middle of Kuroshio Lake. I arrived in this world around ten days ago."

"What is your purpose of coming here?"

The demon showed signs of hesitation and fell silent.

The Sacred Whistle at the tip of Link's wand immediately dashed out and pierced through the abdomen of the demon before exploding inside his body. This injury would not be lethal but would cause unimaginable pain to a demon's body.

Around 0.1 seconds after the release of the first Sacred Whistle, Link was already prepared with another one fully charged at the tip of his wand. It seemed as though the previous release was all but an illusion.

However, the pain was about as real as it could be. The burning sensation in his abdomen caused the demon to flail around on the ground in pain. He immediately roared his reply in fear that he would once again be subjected to the same treatment, "To protect the Holy Maiden. Yes, it is to protect her!"

"Her name?" Link replied almost instantaneously. This was to give the opponent no time to construct his thoughts and thus forcing him to speak the truth.

"Elena," The demon mentioned a familiar name.

"If you are protecting the maiden you should know the person of contact. Are they the Dark Elves?" Link asked. There was no point in simply protecting her. Elena had already gotten the structure of three Mage Towers of the academy. She must have been tasked to deliver them back to their base. The low-level demon in front of them would definitely not be enough to accomplish this task. The Dark Elves must have sent someone else as a point of contact.

"Yes...oh no actually... Ahh! Yes, there is one! He is a Dark Elf named Lawndale Markins. I came here together with him!" The demon grimaced in pain as his moment of hesitation had once again earned him a blow of the Sacred Whistle.

"Where are they now?" There was not a hint of emotion in Link's voice or face. But there were already violent ripples in his heart. If Felidia, Alina and Ainos were the three musketeers of the Silver Moon, then Lawndale Markins and Aymons de Romilson would be the two pillars of the Dark Elves!

They were not extremely talented individuals nor did they accomplish any feats in the game. In fact, they even seemed mediocre at their very best. However, if one were to look down on them, they would definitely suffer the taste of defeat.

They belonged to the group of people who would never make mistakes and advance their motives carefully step-by-step. One would usually call these people strategic geniuses.

A race would need people like the three musketeers to raise morale. They were important people as well, although they were more like the icing on the cake. There would be no serious ramifications if they did not exist. However, if people like Aymons who could stabilize and analyze the situation clearly did not exist, a race might face complete destruction.

"The fight with the Dark Elves has only just begun," Link sighed.

However, Link concealed his emotions extremely well. The demon could not see through his expression. Furthermore, the fear of being tortured had already put him under great pressure. He could only speak the truth now.

"In Chestnut Village. I beg of you please kill me. I have already told you all that I know." The demon was clear of his situation. He knew that he could not escape from Link alive. All he wanted was a quick and painless death.

Eleanor softly whispered, "Chestnut Village was where I found Elena. I know the exact location."

Link nodded slightly and asked, "You said that Elena was a Holy Maiden. Which God is she serving?" This was what Link wanted to know.

However, the demon repeatedly shook his head, "I have no idea. I truly don't. It was

Lawndale who called me here. He calls her the Holy Maiden and therefore I do as well. Why would I bother to ask who she serves?" This was the truth. He said it without hesitation.

"How strong is Lawndale Markins?" This was the last question. According to history, the Lawndale in this timeline had not fully matured. He should even be slightly weaker than Felidia.

"He is extremely weak! I can destroy him with one hand! His magic is a joke. If he did not know my real name, I would have smashed his skull a long time ago!" The demon lashed out, confirming Link's suspicions.

Link had already asked all his questions. He reckoned that the demon had outlived its usefulness and fired the Sacred Whistle straight into his skull.

The demon jerked violently before he became completely motionless. Following which, a huge amount of black smog emerged from its body. This gas corroded everything along its way and in the blink of an eye, the land had turned into a polluted marshland. The surrounding vegetation withered at a speed visible to the naked eye, while the ground turned into a noxious concoction of poison and mud. For the vegetation that was slightly further away, they escaped death narrowly, though, the color of their leaves and bark had turned many shades darker. It was extremely ominous looking.

This gas extended to a full 30 meters before dissipating.

Link knew that if he left this land as is and let the powers of nature purify it, this land would take at least three years before it would return to its original state.

Eleanor's eyes widened in horror. "How terrifying! The Legends have stated that after our forefather killed a powerful demon, the poisonous smog would pollute lands even hundreds of miles away. I have always thought they were exaggerating. Now, it seems like they were speaking the truth."

Link nodded. "We were lucky that this demon was not strong. We can purify this easily with flames. Eleanor, I need your help for this one. Use the Flame Blast spell."

"I understand."

The two of them stood with their backs against each other and started using the single

directional Flame Blast spell consecutively.

The boiling magma flowed through the lands and roasted everything along its way. The soil was swept violently through the currents while the vegetation was burned to ashes. Amongst the violent fluctuations of energy, the demonic forces were decomposed into a more basic elemental energy.

When they were done, green smog could be seen rising from the ground. However, the ground had already turned from an ominous black color to one that was normal. There might still be some residual demonic energy here, but those were negligible.

After the purification, Eleanor led the way while Link followed behind. They made a beeline for Chestnut Village.

On the way, Eleanor introduced the situation to Link. "Chestnut Village is not huge. There are only about 200 people in it. It is a small farmland that belongs to a noble in the area. After a month of observation, I realized that Elena is extremely good at hiding her identity. She looks just like an ordinary countrywoman, Lisa in front of everyone else. I could find no flaws in her acting. If not for the fact that I've seen her resurrection first hand, I could not have imagined that she was the Holy Maiden."

Link could totally imagine the situation. He once stayed with this woman for several months in the same Mage Tower and failed to find any flaws in her disguise. Even a genius like Eliard was played like a pawn by her hands. She was a dangerous woman.

Link then asked, "Did you see the Dark Elf, Lawndale Markins?"

"No. I have no idea if he made contact with the Holy Maiden. I did not notice his existence at all. He must have been concealing himself well."

"This Dark Elf is not very powerful. However, he is extremely vigilant. As the demon contractor, he should be fully aware that the demon is dead. We need to hurry."

Link summoned the Wind Fenrir and sat behind Eleanor after helping her up. The Wind Fenrir then darted out like a gust of strong gale, charging straight towards Chestnut Village upon Eleanor's directions.

...

Chestnut Village.

Elena felt slightly uneasy. As a countrywoman, she was weaving using the spinning wheel in her room.

In order to play a variety of roles, she learned a number of skills. Weaving was an essential skill that all countrywoman needed to know. As a veteran actress, she was of course, well-versed in it.

The spinning wheel creaked with a routine rhythm, but Elena's mind was completely not focused on her current activity.

Four days earlier, the demon found a person peeping at her. He had not returned after giving chase for such a long time. It was starting to feel strange.

"Did something happen?" Elena felt uneasy. However, she had to maintain her composure and not show any signs that could reveal her true identity. Her role as a countrywoman had greatly restricted her movements. Furthermore, she had lost all her powers due to her resurrection.

At that moment, a faint figure appeared in the dark corner of the room. A soft voice then rang in her head, "Elena, leave now. Darl is dead. We have been exposed."

This came as a shock to Elena. She had witnessed the demon's power first hand. Who could have killed him in the Girvent Fores?

However, now was not the time to be worried over such things. In fact, after knowing that Darl as dead, she felt unexpectedly calm. She then spoke, "Lawndale, do not care about me. I have no powers now and would only slow you down."

She still intended to leave. However, she had no powers and had to be sure that Lawndale truly wished to protect her and take her away. If he left her to her own devices in the middle of the road, she would be in trouble.

"How can I do that? You are the sacred Holy Maiden. You must stay alive. Stop hesitating, come with me!" The voice sounded determined. He then walked out of the dark corner and revealed his appearance. It was a Dark Elf about 25 years of age. He looked extremely ordinary and his eyes did not have the usual evil charm that most Dark Elves had. In fact, there was a hint of loyalty in them. He pulled Elena's hand and dashed out of the room.

"But I will slow you down," Elena once again spoke in a delicate voice.

Lawndale had a passionate expression on his face and assured, "Don't worry, I will see that you are safe even if it meant sacrificing my life!"

Upon hearing those words, Elena bowed her head and gently whispered, "Thank you, Lawndale."

A smirk then appeared on her face as she thought, What a gullible young lad.

However, as Elena was feeling satisfied, she did not realize that the Dark Elf who was holding her hands so firmly was staring at her with a look of mockery.

Using slutty tricks to deceive me? I am only doing this out of respect for master. If I am successful, good for you. If I am not...you are merely a disposable prostitute, Lawndale thought with disgust.

Chapter 177

A Tough Opponent

When Link and Eleanor arrived at Chestnut Village it was already after three in the afternoon. Thick dark clouds covered the sun in the sky making it quite dark; it even seemed as if a storm was brewing as gusts of wind swayed the trees around the small village till they flailed helplessly in the air.

"It's going to rain soon," said Eleanor gloomily as she looked up at the sky. "If they fled through the forest the rain would wash away all their tracks; we might not be able to follow them then."

Link frowned as well. He didn't expect to encounter such bad weather today.

To prevent from shocking the villagers, Link had stopped at the edge of the forest and halted the Wind Fenrir. They then continued the journey into the village on foot.

The villagers here had hardly ever received any visitors from outside the tiny remote mountain village, so when Link and Eleanor appeared they all flocked to see these strangers who looked so different from them. The children were particularly boisterous around them. Most of these kids didn't wear any clothes at all and they ran about in front of Link and Eleanor with their naked little butts fully exposed.

The children loved to gather around Eleanor and stared at her with wonder. This was completely understandable because of Link's unremarkable looks, so they naturally found nothing about him that was admirable. Meanwhile, Eleanor was dressed in a black Magician's dress that was made with luxurious materials. She had an extraordinary looking bracelet on each of her delicate wrists and her face was simply enchanting. To the villagers, she was no less magical than an angel who'd just stepped out of a painting!

Eleanor had lived a solitary life for the past century, so she was quite moved by the experience of being surrounded and admired so closely and openly by so many people. Even though she was the center of everyone's attention then, Eleanor was also staring at the villagers in wonder herself.

"I've heard that a woman in the village had received the God of Light's blessings and was resurrected," said Link to a farmer he just approached. "We are here on a pilgrimage to witness the Lord's miracle. Would you tell me where we can find her?"

Once the farmer and the other villagers around him heard Link's words they all lit up with a smile that was full of pride and honor. Although they'd always flocked to the visitors from the outside world that they occasionally received, experience taught them to be wary of outsiders as they might bring harm to the village. Still, these two visitors were pilgrims, so they must be pious followers of the God of Light, therefore they couldn't come with any intention to harm them.

Then, a young man stepped up closer to Link and introduced himself proudly.

"By the glory of the God of Light, it is true, stranger," he said. "There is indeed a woman in this village who was resurrected. She's my wife, Lisa. Both of you follow me, she would be glad to tell you what she saw in heaven."

Link and Eleanor looked at each other then followed the young man.

The houses in the village were very simple with wooden doors, thatched walls and thatched roofs. Each family had a small courtyard. Link followed the young man for about three hundred feet on a road heaped with a sludge of cattle and sheep dung. Finally, they stopped in front of a small courtyard.

"Here we are, this is my home," said the young man happily. He then shouted, "Lisa! Lisa! You've got visitors!"

They waited there for a while but there was no response except for an old brown dog who came out from the backyard after hearing its owner's voice.

"That's strange," said the man, confused. "Where is she?" He pushed the door open and checked inside the house. Lisa should be spinning the yarn inside at this hour, but as he entered the house all he saw was a vacant wheel without any yarn and no sight of his wife.

"Lisa? Lisa?" The young man was starting to get anxious. He walked out of the house and headed towards the courtyard to tell the visitors about his missing wife, but when he came out he discovered that the two strangers were gone as well.

"Huh? Where did they go?" remarked the young man in growing perplexity. "Lisa,

where are you? Lisa?" The young man then continued to call out her name all around the house, but the only response he got was silence.

Meanwhile, outside in the courtyard, Link and Eleanor were both enveloped in the faint aura of a high-level Invisibility spell. They saw how the young man still couldn't find his wife and his face had gradually become darker and gloomier.

"She must've got wind of the news that we're coming," said Eleanor. This wasn't surprising to Link at all. The minute he knew that Lawndale was involved he realized that they shouldn't expect much from this trip to the Chestnut Village.

Lawndale was still unknown at the time, but Link knew even then that he was a much tougher opponent to deal with than Felidia. This Dark Elf knew its own strengths and limits and he knew how to work around them. He would never take any unnecessary risks or make any rash decision. All in all, this was a sharp, precise and decisive Dark Elf that must not be underestimated.

Eleanor stayed silent. Her eyes were as black as Link's and they were now glowing faintly in a purple aura as they were keeping a close eye on the little wooden house where Lisa or Elena was supposed to be.

Eleanor was using a tracking spell to track her.

Half a second later, she turned away from the house and walked towards its backyard. Link understood that this meant she had picked up on the woman's trail, so he followed right behind Eleanor.

Just then, the man in the yard had grown panicked and was calling wife's name over and over again, his voice heavy with worry and fear. Moments later, a white-haired old man and an old woman started to join the search and was calling out Lisa's name as well. They must've been the young man's parents.

Link let out a heavy sigh at the sight of those people searching for someone Link knew was gone forever. To Link, he was only pursuing Elena to thwart the Black Moon Conspiracy which might have worried him very much but once it's over he would move on from it easily. To this family, though, especially to the young man, this would be a great tragedy that they might grieve over for the rest of their lives.

They'd lost the young woman Lisa once, but she'd come back before they came to terms with her passing. Now that she's back for a month she's gone once again and

the whole family would have to go through the grieving process all over again. This kind of torment was enough to make a man go crazy!

Link sighed, then grabbed ten gold coins from his storage pendant and floated it through a window into the house using Magician's Hand. This amount would be enough for the young man to find a new wife and begin his life anew. Link didn't know how much it would help but he hoped that it could at least slightly alleviate the pain the young man and his family would have to suffer in the future.

Eleanor gave Link a look when she noticed what he was doing.

"It was the man's fate to lose his wife," she said. "Things like this happen all the time all over Firuman, and it happens to countless men and women. There's nothing you can do about it, it's just a fact of life."

"Why did you have to make such a fuss over a small act of kindness?" replied Link. "I just felt sorry for them and wanted to help in any way I could, that's all."

Eleanor was taken aback by Link's words and stared at him wordlessly for a while.

For the past century or so, Eleanor had come across so many self-professed moralists who spouted all sorts of noble ideals. But she was sure that when these men were in the same position as Link was now, five out of ten would've just ignored the family and moved on indifferently. Four of them might offer them some comforting words, while one of them might give them some money, albeit not without letting everyone know how kind they had been to the less fortunate. Eleanor had never met anyone like Link in her long life who would just leave the money to the family without letting anyone know, all because he felt sorry for them.

Perhaps this was the reason why a Master Magician like Eleanor had always trusted Link unconditionally and knew intuitively that he would never betray her.

She then silently grabbed five gold coins from her storage ring and flung it into the house through the same window.

"This should be enough for him to get a beautiful new wife," she said. Fifteen gold coins were indeed a fortune for a farmer's family, it might even be such a big amount that it would bring them trouble, although Link said nothing of the matter and just smiled at Eleanor.

The two then continued to follow the trail. They did not use any magic spells to increase their speed because the Mana fluctuation would interfere with what already weak scent they left. Soon after, they were lead into the forest behind the village. When they followed the trail for about a quarter mile, Eleanor suddenly stopped in her tracks.

"What's wrong?" asked Link, he thought Eleanor's tracking spell should be able to detect the trails without any problems seeing that she was a Master Magician specializing in secret spells.

"It's strange," said Eleanor, frowning, "but the trail has been divided into two, and I don't know which one we should follow." She hadn't been worried about not being able to detect the trails, it wasn't for no reason that she was a mighty Level-6 Master Magician. But now that the spell was leading her to two different trails, she was simply flummoxed.

"Just choose any one of them, then," answered Link after thinking about it.

There was no other choice, anyway. Eleanor then chose the trail on the left, and so they followed it for a while and then she stopped abruptly again. Her eyebrows almost knitted to each other now.

"The trail forked into two again," she said, full of frustration. "What's going on here? Did she know how to duplicate herself?"

"Just choose another trail, then," said Link, who now began to feel confused as well. Too bad this was the only way they could trace them, and Link himself wasn't proficient in tracking spells, so he could only rely on Eleanor in this case.

They had no other choice, so Eleanor chose the trail on her right and they walked along for another half mile. This time not only did Eleanor stop suddenly, but her jaw was dropped as well.

Right there, in front of them, was a very familiar scene—it was where they first started to notice the trail had divided into two!

"We're running around in circles!" said Eleanor. "What exactly is going on here?"

Link stood there in silence, contemplating the matter. Then, a few seconds later, he had a revelation.

"Although Elena was good at manipulating men," he said, "I don't think she'd think of this trick. This must be the Dark Elf's doing. I must admit that it's an ingenious plan—what he did was he just deliberately wandered around in the forest. There was a 50% percent chance each time the trail divided that we would choose the wrong trail, which would then lead us back to the original spot, and that would give him more time to make his escape!"

It was such a simple plan in pLinkiple but when it was combined with the complex terrain of the mountainous forest here, this trick could waste a lot of the pursuer's time. Even if Link and Eleanor had known from the start that this trick had been used, they'd still have to bet on luck and choose a trail randomly. Obviously, Eleanor's luck wasn't so good today as she'd chosen the wrong route, which had taken them back to where they started.

Eleanor had a sharp mind herself, so she immediately understood what the Dark Elf was planning just from Link's simple explanation. Still, she had some points she didn't quite understand.

"But how could he be so sure that we'd choose the wrong path?" she asked. "What if we did choose the right path? Wouldn't that just waste the time that he could've spent on escaping?"

"I'm afraid it isn't that simple," answered Link with a gentle shake of his head.

Link knew from the game that Lawndale was a man who took no risks. Link guessed that even if Eleanor had chosen the right trail she would still be stumped by another trick further down. Besides, the possibility that Eleanor would choose the right trail twice was smaller than one in three anyway, so there was a good chance that they could buy some time in their escape.

"So what do we do now?" asked Eleanor.

"We'll continue the chase," said Link. Since their scent was still there, it must mean that they're not that far away, so they still had a chance to catch up.

"Alright, then," answered Eleanor.

The two then continued their tracking of Elena and the Dark Elf, this time choosing different trails from the ones they did before.

After more than half a mile, Eleanor stopped for the third time.

"There's a fork in the trail again," she said. "I hate this damned Dark Elf bastard! Which direction should we choose now, left or right?"

"Can you sense any difference between the two trails at all?" asked Link.

"No," answered Eleanor, shaking her head. "The scent they left was too sparse and dispersed."

After listening to Eleanor's reply, Link started to get more serious and examine the traces left on the ground himself. Because he'd been spending a lot of time learning the art of enchantment, he had become especially observant, much more so than the average Magician. This was because he must make sure that there was no mistake at all in his spell structure, not even the smallest magic rune, otherwise the magic gear would fail.

Link couldn't detect the scent in the atmosphere that Eleanor was following at all, but he could still detect the physical tracks that Elena and the Dark Elf left on the surrounding such as footprints, snapped branches, bent blades of grass and so on. If he examined them closely enough, there were clues there that would be helpful in tracking them down.

Because the forest floor was covered in fallen leaves, the footprints could not be relied on as there was no difference at all between the footprints in both trails. Fortunately, though, the snapped off stems of trees did provide him with valuable clues.

Link could judge how long the tree stems had been snapped off by their freshness. Those that were newly broken off would still be moist, while those that had been broken off a long time ago would have dried off, and so he could judge the length of time since Elena and the Dark Elf had passed the trail.

In this case, the difference was minute, but it was enough for Link's eyes to discern.

"Let's follow the one on the right," said Link after examining the trail for three minutes. "They passed through this way about forty minutes ago."

"Alright, then," said Eleanor, who then promptly followed the trail that Link had chosen.

They then walked on for about half a mile. Then, the trail forked into two again. At this point they were beginning to suspect if the Dark Elf knew a spell that could divide himself into two identical bodies.

"This is not good," Eleanor spread out her hands helplessly. "There are two trails again."

"Don't get frustrated," said Link calmly. "We'll just keep moving forward."

And so, they followed the trail and persisted on for half a mile. No new tracks appeared, and Eleanor's frown began to deepen, but Link started to smile instead.

Seeing that Eleanor was about to give up, Link realized he had to say something.

"He didn't walk in circles to confuse us this time," said Link, smiling, "he just walked forward as he normally would. There are two trails here, because one was used by the Dark Elf when he was coming in this direction, while the other trail is the one he is currently walking on. If I'm not mistaken, they shouldn't be too far away from us now."

Lawndale had been in the Chestnut Village for quite a while and he was very familiar with Norton Kingdom, so he must've made thorough preparations for an escape route in case their plans were found out.

Eleanor was still skeptical, though.

They walked on for another half a mile when Link noticed new tracks on the ground.

"Elena's new body must've slowed them down to a crawl!" he said with a laugh. "We should catch up with them in no time."

They then went further for few more minutes. Then, Link noticed there was a woman by the roadside. A dagger was stuck in the back of the woman's head and blood came gushing out of the wound. She looked as if she had just died, though her eyes were stuck open and her face was frozen in an expression of shock.

Eleanor's eyes widened as she realized who it was.

"It's Lisa!" she exclaimed, horrified. "Who killed her?"

"It must've been the Dark Elf, he must've thought that she's dragging him down, so he

discarded her," said Link, squatting down in front of Lisa's body to examine her wound. He then shook his head. "There's no denying that the Dark Elf was cold-blooded. It's far too late to save her, she's dead."

"The Dark Elf shouldn't be too far away from us now," said Eleanor. "Should we increase our speed?" She'd seen how cold and calculative this opponent was, and she was sure that without Link's help there was no way she could catch up with him.

"There's no use," said Link, shaking his head. "We won't catch him today."

"Why not?" asked Eleanor, slightly puzzled. But just then she felt a drop of water on her face and she couldn't help but sigh. "Seems like it's going to be a heavy rain."

The rain would definitely flush away all traces of the Dark Elf's trails. Had the Dark Elf still brought Elena with him, she would've slowed him down enough that Link could probably find a way to catch up with them. But now that Lawndale had gotten rid of the burden, there was no hope they'd ever catch up with him.

He checked his mission status on the interface and discovered that it was still incomplete. When they were investigating and following the trails, the notification box of the Black Moon Conspiracy mission did flash up on the interface from time to time, though Link couldn't make out any details in the notification at all.

In the end, Link had been outplayed in this encounter with Lawndale, who managed to stay a step ahead. He learned today how important it was to not take the strong and prominent figures in this world lightly, or else they could slip out and escape right under your nose.

Chapter 178

The Final Step

They were unsuccessful in tracking the Dark Elves. However, they killed the demon and determined Elena's true whereabouts. Link then bade farewell to Eleanor and returned to the academy to report the Lawndale incident to Herrera.

Herrera valued Link's opinions and immediately reported the matter to the dean. Upon hearing the news, it was rumored that Anthony was so furious and shocked that the crystal glass he was holding fell out his hand and shattered into pieces.

The alert level of the entire academy was already very high. This time, they raised it even a notch higher, upgrading every single pivotal Mage Tower in the academy.

They seemed to be preparing for a formidable enemy.

The amount of attention the academy placed on this issue gave Link a peace of mind. In the days that followed, he simply charged the Prophet white stone whenever he could while continuing his magic research, trying to improve his knowledge as much as possible before the fated day.

He had a practical goal, which was to shorten the casting time of his Level-6 spell, the Titan's Hand. While the spell had great offensive power, Link still needed at least five seconds to cast the spell even with the help of the in-game system. The combat utility of the spell was thus, heavily compromised.

This was the awkward part about being a Magician. The higher the level of the spell, the more complex the magic structure. Although the strength of the spell would increase exponentially each level, so would the casting time.

During a battle, the higher the level of the opponents, the lesser the advantage a Magician had over other professions. This was true all the way until a Magician attained the Legendary status.

Link simply needed to reduce his spellcasting time—even 0.1 seconds would be a significant reduction.

The East Cove Higher Magic Academy was recovering well from their minor setback.

On the other hand, Dark Elf Lawndale had just narrowly escaped from Link's pursuit. He did not dare to stay in the Girvent Forest any longer and made his journey all the way back to the North.

Around half a month later, Lawndale returned to the Black Lake.

This was the core area of the Black Forest. Although the Norton Kingdom was advancing fast into the territory, their vanguard forces were still at least 500 miles away. Hence, this area was still safe.

After circling around the lake for half a mile, Lawndale saw a dock ahead. No boatman could be seen on the pier, although a few wooden canoes could be seen. Lawndale casually embarked onto a wooden canoe and tapped his toes gently onto the magic circle engraved on it. As mana surged into the magic circle, the water elemental spell that was enchanted onto the canoe was instantly activated.

The small wooden canoe darted out and headed towards the island in the center of the lake steadily but rapidly. There was a Mage Tower on the island called Horton Tower. This tower belonged to his mentor, Duke Aymons.

Aymons was a Level-7 Magician, and his parliamentary status in the Silver Moon was only secondary to the Chancellor. The demon that accompanied him to the Girvent Forest this time around was also summoned by his mentor.

After 20 minutes, Lawndale stepped onto the island. The island was filled with dense overgrowth, and one could vaguely see shadows drifting amongst the thick mist. These shadows were all tower guard demons who were summoned by his mentor. Their strength was around Level-3 to Level-4, and their battle abilities were almost three times higher than ordinary soldiers of their level.

Lawndale charged his staff with mana which caused it to glow in a light purple hue. This was a magic marking. Under the effect of this magic marking, he would not be attacked by these demonic creatures.

He then stepped cautiously into the forest. After ten minutes, a tower with a similar exterior to that of a castle appeared in his field of vision. The tower was surrounded by a circle of tall walls, and a 12-foot-tall demon stood aloofly at the entrance of the gate.

Not only was the demon tall, but there was also a thick layer of demonic scales surrounding his tough exterior. There were almost no gaps in this dense armor and a knife shaped horn grew from its skull. He looked extremely intimidating as he held two giant swords which were larger than Lawndale himself in his hands.

This demon was called Bruttan, a Level-7 Demon Warrior. He was the strongest demon his mentor had ever summoned, and probably had the power to crush the entire army of Firuman Warriors if he wanted to.

Lawndale greeted the demon with respect and said, "Dear Bruttan, I would like to speak to my mentor."

The demon looked down condescendingly at Lawndale and rumbled with disdain, "Little one, didn't you bring Nobi together with you? Where is he?"

"Nobi was met with misfortune. I was just about to report to my mentor regarding this issue."

"What? Who could have killed Nobi? He might have been a bit of a joke, but his power is not something that you mortals can ever hope to match up to. Tell me who did it!" Bruttan stared at Lawndale with bloodshot eyes, his pupils burning with violent tendencies.

Lawndale felt pressured by the intimidating gaze, so much so that he felt difficulty breathing. He tried to remain calm and said, "Dear Bruttan, I need to see my mentor."

At that moment, a voice rang from the Mage Tower, "Bruttan, let him in."

Upon hearing the sound, Bruttan's intimidating stature dissipated. He muttered a few words under his breath before obediently clearing the path for Lawndale.

Lawndale heaved a sigh of relief and entered the tower. Once he was inside the castle walls, he finally saw his fellow Dark Elves. Some of them were his direct seniors and juniors, while others were servants that he had grown close to in the past few years. He immediately felt a lot more at ease.

As one of the Magicians saw Lawndale, he pointed to the tower and said, "Mentor is waiting for you at the rooftop balcony. Please make your way there."

"How is he feeling?" Lawndale whispered.

"I cannot tell. Probably not too bad," the Magician replied.

"Alright. Thank you." Lawndale needed to prepare himself.

Lawndale climbed up the winding grey staircase to the rooftop balcony. The balcony was extremely wide and was enveloped in a translucent light dome. Through the dome, the area within a six-mile radius from the Horton Tower seemed to be brought infinitely closer without any compromise on the details.

An old man clad in a grey robe stood silently on one side of the roof. He did not turn his body even when he heard some noises behind him. He simply spoke softly, "In my dreams, the Dark Lady brought me a message. She mentioned that the Lord in the South is extremely displeased with your action of killing Elena."

The Dark Lady and the Lord in the South were all god-like presences. For a mortal to have angered a god—this was absolutely not good news.

However, there was no hint of fear on Lawndale's face. He calmly explained, "The situation then was dire. If I hadn't killed her, she would have ended up in the hands of East Cove Higher Magic Academy. If that truly happened, I am sure the Lord in the South would be even more unhappy."

"Yes." Aymons nodded. He then turned around, revealing his face filled with wrinkles and a pair of white pupils. He was already blind.

"Nobi could not be considered weak. Who could have killed him?" Aymons asked.

"I was in a hurry then. The downpour that happened erased most of my evidence of escape. I only managed to catch a glimpse of him from afar. It should be that guy."

There was no need for names or descriptions. As Lawndale's mentor, Aymons knew exactly who he was talking about. He said, "This is your first time dealing with him. What do you think?"

Lawndale recounted his experience in the Girvent Forest, and his eyes twitched ever so slightly. "I am not his opponent in a direct battle as of now. However, I am confident that our mental capabilities are on par. Although there is one area where he is stronger than me by leaps and bounds."

"Tell me more." There was no hint of emotional fluctuations in Aymon's voice.

"He is not a one-man team. He has already gathered a powerful alliance around him. I have done my research and realized that he has allies in the academy, the mercenary band, MI3, the merchant world and even a Level-6 Secret Magician. There have even been rumors that he is on good terms with Princess Celine. Not only is he open-minded, but he is also humble. I could not feel even a hint of the usual arrogance that Magicians had on him. He can always accurately determine the talents of others and is highly charismatic. These social skills are what makes him extremely dangerous."

This plan was meant to be carried out in secret; Chestnut Village was an extremely remote area. Nobi was originally only tasked to track down a Level-6 Secret Magician. However, Link's appearance messed up the entire plan.

Who would imagine that an official Magician from the highly prestigious East Cove Higher Magic Academy would have connections with a secret Magician that had once dabbled in the dark arts? This was the preposterous scene that happened right in front of Lawndale's eyes.

This made Lawndale feel extremely vulnerable. He felt as though Link had multiple tentacles, some of which he was still unaware of. If he ever stepped foot into the Girvent Forest, he might be done in by any one of them as long as he made a single mistake.

It was almost impossible to defend against such tactics.

Aymons stayed silent for a long time before speaking again, "The Dark Lady once told me that the God of Light found a new Chosen One amongst the people of Firuman. Originally, I thought nothing of it. It would at most be another Bryant. However, it seems that the situation is more dire than I have imagined."

The Legendary Magician Bryant; all mortals would have heard of his righteous name and probably revered him in his endless glory. However, the people who were familiar with the true history knew that the reason Bryant could achieve such extraordinary feats was only partly due to his gift. The other reason was the blessings of God.

He was the previous candidate chosen by the God of Light.

Furthermore, while Bryant indeed became the Legendary Magician that everyone respected and loved, he was eccentric and a hopeless romantic. He spent his whole life tangling with a High Elf woman, and even made a rash decision out of love.

Bryant could serve as a deterrent to the dark forces and good role model for the people of Firuman. However, he did not know how to surround himself with allies. No matter how strong Bryant became, it was impossible for him to change the world. In fact, a demon named Tarviss was all it took to wear him down.

However, this new candidate was something else.

Lawndale then followed up, "What do we do then?"

Aymons shook his head. "We must treat this person seriously. However, the priority is to first destroy the Norton Kingdom Army who is currently heading north."

Lawndale looked at Aymons with a surprised expression, "Mentor, are we going to activate the God item?"

Aymons nodded, his grey-white eyes turning towards the crystal screen on his side. "The time is almost ripe. The East Cove Higher Magic Academy is the final step."

The moment the academy fell, the Norton Kingdom would lose most of its defensive power. Their magic capabilities would also be reduced by at least 50%. Coupled with the power of the God item, it would be easy for the Dark Elves to reverse the situation.

"Mentor, are you saying that we need to bring forward the Black Moon Conspiracy? But the old guy in the Tower of Azula might not be ready."

"Oh, the old guy is merely a sacrifice," Aymons laughed.

Chapter 179

The Looming Crisis

At the Azura Tower of the East Cove Magic Academy.

The squat, white tower was like a silent old man, standing there soberly on the hillside overlooking the entire East Cove Magic Academy.

It was a place where those that were wicked and evil were cast away from the outside world since time immemorial. Over the course of centuries, countless secrets were buried in the tower where even the dean of the East Cove Magic Academy couldn't possibly unearth.

What went on inside the white tower? What did the prisoners inside think, plan and do? No one knew.

Bale sat cross-legged inside his cage in the white tower. Outwardly it would seem that he sat there motionless, doing nothing. The guards in the tower who were responsible for maintaining the prisoners' elemental balance walked past him without batting an eye.

Yet they didn't realize that Bale was very much active on the spiritual level. He was communicating with some of the prisoners kept in the tower's dungeons deep underground.

"Did you expect me to believe a sock puppet like you?" a gloomy voice rang in Bale's head. "Did you really think that I'd believe you could help us escape?" The owner of this voice had been imprisoned in the dungeons for 300 years, so the 70-year-old Bale was, in his eyes, a little boy still playing house.

"I guarantee it with my soul," Bale vowed. "I will find a way for us to escape."

"Ha! To hell with your soul! It's probably worth a few coppers!" sneered another voice. "Still, your plan doesn't sound half bad. If Tarviss was released, then the whole East Cove would surely be brought to ashes."

"So what if the East Cove was brought to ashes? That's got nothing to do with me," this voice was exceptionally brutish, as its owner was a magical beast with a high level of intelligence. "That pathetic group of people who call themselves Magicians locked me down here for two hundred years! I can't wait to go out and eat them all!"

"Of course the academy has nothing to do with you, you're just a wild beast!" replied another voice. "But I'm a member of the academy, those who'd locked me up are all gone, so I have no more reason to hate the academy."

"That's right," rang out a chorus of voices, "I won't trust a plan with a wild beast in it!"

"Who are you calling a wild beast!" the magical creature's voice boomed. "When I get out I'll bite off all of your heads!"

"You motherf*cking animal!" another voice responded immediately.

For a time, the group of monsters who had been locked up in the tower for decades or even centuries began a war of words with each other in Bale's mind. They'd all forgotten the reason why they were having a discussion in the first place.

Bale's head was about to explode at the chaos that erupted. It wasn't the first time he'd used the Spiritual Nexus to communicate with the prisoners of the Azura Tower. Yet, every time these monsters got together they always ended up in dispute, so they never really came to any kind of agreement.

He then ended the Spiritual Nexus spell, and all the voices in his head disappeared immediately. The world was coldly silent again.

What should I do? thought Bale while he massaged his temple. He had recovered the Mana in his body up to 70% of his former strength and even his eyes had restored its function. This was undoubtedly good progress.

With this level of strength, he could probably cause a bit of ruckus in the Azura Tower, but nowhere near collapsing and destroying it. Right now, he probably couldn't even defeat the tower guards who walked past his cell every day. Their attack strategy was very simple, all they did was continuously shoot an Elemental Arrow, which moved at an incredible speed and contained the power equivalent to a Level-6 spell.

Once you were surrounded by a large group of guards attacking you with various types of Elemental Arrows, it didn't matter how high your level was or how powerful you

had been. In fact, even the dean Anthony himself wouldn't be able to escape unscathed under these circumstances.

There was only one way to destroy the Azura Tower and escape from here, and that was to release the demon Tarviss. And the only way to do that was to unite the powers of all the prisoners in this tower, but these prisoners...well, they all came from different places and different backgrounds, so it was tricky to keep them on the same page, to say the least.

Just as Bale was brooding hard on the matter, he felt a shake in his consciousness. Immediately afterwards, he thought he saw a burst of white light in the depths of his mind, and the burst was so intense that all he could see was the bright white light.

He then completely lost consciousness.

After a while, Bale opened his eyes again. These were the eyes of a Lich which looked like a pair of faintly burning green flames. This light was different from before, though, because the body was now inhibited by someone else.

Not bad, thought the new Bale. The old geezer has been working hard. His strength has recovered so much in just a matter of months.

Bale didn't understand what happened before he was knocked out, but it was actually related to the communication runes earlier.

The Dark Elf Silver Moon Council leader Manrod, a Level-8 Magician with unparalleled skills, was so far the strongest of all Magicians, second only to the Queen of High Elves.

With communication runes, Manrod could send voices into Bale's mind. He could also naturally transmit other things into his mind as well, including, when the situation warranted it, a direct telepathic control of Bale's body.

But this kind of control over Bale's body came with great limitations as well, the most important one of which was time. It wasn't that Bale's body couldn't withstand this method, instead, it was Manrod's own soul that wouldn't be able to tolerate the enormous load that this method would exert on him. If he ever exceeded his limits, his soul would immediately collapse.

I can only stay here for three days, thought Manrod. But the success of the Black Moon Conspiracy hinges on this plan, so I mustn't waste it.

There was originally no need for him to undertake such a high-risk mission, but the plans had changed since the Norton Kingdom's army had turned out to be so strong. The Dark Elves had suffered several consecutive defeats and lost many strategic advantages. If the war dragged on this way, it was possible that the Pralync Kingdom could never be saved even with the activation of the divine gear.

And so, here he was.

He combed through Bale's memories and quickly grasped the situation in this prison tower.

It's full of a bunch of idiots, Manrod thought with a bitter smile.

There was no use in talking reason with such idiots. What would've worked best was a show of superiority, power and confidence. They would quickly trust you if they're convinced that you possessed these things, then they'd start to believe that you really could get them out of here.

Unfortunately, Bale lacked the strength to do this, so he was stuck with using reason to convince these idiots, which naturally would always result in bickering.

Manrod then checked the power that Bale's body possessed, then he chose to once again cast the secret spell—Spiritual Nexus.

Spiritual Nexus

Level-6 Secret Spell

Effects: Constructs a very secretive communication network by connecting the spellcaster with the souls around him through mysterious Mana energy.

(Note: Do you want to communicate with people covertly? Then learn this spell.)

As soon as the spell was cast, Manrod noticed spots of light all around him. He knew that each of these light spots was a soul, and these souls were all of the prisoners in the Azura Tower.

These souls were connected to the network one by one, and each of their voices started to ring loudly in Manrod's head.

"You bastard!" said a voice. "I was just in the middle of my sentence, why did you stop the damned spell?"

"You little bastard," said another voice, "can someone like you really get us out of this shithole of a place?"

"Kid, I'm telling you," said a different voice, "I can promise to cooperate with you, but if it involves releasing Tarviss, then I'm out!"

The voices all mingled together into a buzzing noise, but Manrod still stayed silent calm and only waited for the voices to settle down a bit before he chimed in.

"I won't say much," he finally said, "just take a look at this magic seal plan." As he spoke, he transmitted the magic seal plan to each and every mind of the souls there.

"What is this damned thing?" said the ferocious magical creature. He only had faith in his fangs and claws, so he never cared about any magic seals or whatever this thing was.

The others were different, though. Most of the prisoners in Azura Tower were Magicians. The moment Manrod sent out the magic seal plan, these Magicians only had to take a glance at it before they understood its substance and gravity. In just a few seconds they all sank into a deep silence.

Yes, before they were captured and locked away in this cursed tower, most of these prisoners were the strongest and most gifted of their time. You could find Level-6 Master Magicians everywhere in this tower, there were even some Level-7 Master Magicians, although none of them were at Level-8. Still, the moment they saw the magic seal plan, most of them were dumbstruck.

For a long time, the noises in Manrod's head were reduced by 90% as most of them stayed quiet.

About half an hour later, one Magician finally spoke up.

"With this thing, I'm sure we can finally get out of here," he said.

"But Tarviss would still be released..." replied another.

"I don't care about the academy," said a different voice. "All I care is to get out of here!"

"I'll participate in the plan!" said one eager prisoner.

"Hey, what the hell are you guys talking about?" asked the magical beast. "What are you participating in?" He could feel that this time they had a real plan that had a chance of success. This was an opportunity to regain freedom and roam the world again. As a magical creature with high intelligence, there was nothing he desired more than to breathe the air of freedom again. He could still remember the little female beast with her beautiful fur in the warm forest of the south. That soft body, that charming roar—he remembered every little detail even after centuries of imprisonment.

Manrod ignored the wild beast and continued to address the Magicians.

"If there are no objections," he said, "then we'll begin the operation tonight. Any questions?"

It was all silence for a moment in Manrod's mind, then someone finally replied.

"Yes," the voice said, "it would be best if we do this at night."

"Agreed," replied a chorus of voices.

"Hey, don't forget about me!" said the beast. "Take me along with you, I'll participate as well. What are we going to do? Hello?" The beast's voice had lost its fierceness and became quite anxious now. It sounded as if everyone was leaving without him. He didn't want to be left in this sodden place!

Even though they'd been fighting and bickering all along, they were still together for centuries now, how could they just leave him out of such a nice-sounding plan? That's just cruel!

Still, no matter how hard he tried to voice his opinions, nobody paid any attention to him.

Then, suddenly, a hoarse voice rang through Manrod's head.

"I won't do it," said the voice. "I'll stay here. It's not too bad in here, anyway."

"Ha! Are you sure?" Manrod didn't understand what the owner of the voice could possibly be thinking in making that decision.

"Yes, I'm sure," said the voice, calm and resolute. He then added, "All of you do realize that this plan will annihilate the entire East Cove Magic Academy, don't you? No, not only that, but after Tarviss is released, the whole Realm of Light would be turned to ashes and dust. I, Vance, may have committed more than a few crimes in the past, but I will never take part in a plan this evil. And you, are you sure you're the same Bale that we heard before? You sound like two different people. What exactly is going on—"

Before Vance could finish his sentence, Manrod broke the connection of this soul to the network, thus his voice completely disappeared from everyone else's minds.

"We'll be fine without him," said Manrod. "I for one want to get out of here. Who else is with me?"

"I am!"

"For freedom!"

"Hey, what about me?" the magical creature chimed in again, but still no one took any notice of him.

"Very well, then," said Manrod. "We'll begin the operation this midnight!"

Chapter 180

Fastest Spellcasting Speed in History

March 18th

The cold winter had passed, and the warm rays of the sun had once again graced the World of Firuman. When Link opened the window in the morning, he could smell the distinct fragrance of vegetation nourished by the heavy rain last night.

From afar, Link saw that the Willow Forest beside Bryant's Inspiration Courtyard seemed to be covered with a layer of yellow velvet edges. When the spring breeze blew, the petals would be carried along with the wind like snowflakes in the air. Under the warm embrace of the sun, the moisture in the wet ground continued to evaporate, pushing the petals around in the air. The slow and graceful whirlwind of petals was indeed a sight to behold.

Link also saw many other apprentices who woke up early to view the flowers or for the couples, a romantic getaway on the morning of spring. Some others found a remote spot to concentrate on their magic research. From time to time, crisp and hearty laughter could be heard.

The current East Cove Higher Magic Academy indeed looked a setting from a fairy-tale.

Link involuntarily smiled and looked out from his window for a few minutes before returning to his desk.

He first brought out the Prophet's white stone and began charging it with mana. It took barely a few minutes for Link's Mana Points to be completely depleted. A light sound was then emitted, and the material of the stone started to change.

The stone was originally opaque and white in color. However, it had turned into a clear and brilliant crystal with many shining spots sparkling inside it. It was like peering into an endless bounty of stars in the sky.

Link then checked its status.

Prophet's White Stone (Fully Charged)

State: 100/100

Uses: 3/3

Link heaved a sigh of relief. It is finally charged.

He then took a short rest before picking up the quill to dip it in the pot of ink right beside it. He then started to expand on his space-time thesis.

He had been struck with inspiration last night in his dream. He had to write it out as soon as possible before his memory faded.

The thesis had been expanded to a level that was way higher than before. After six months of tireless effort on Link's part, the thesis had reached an incredible stage. It was extremely tough to understand and even to the point of being obscure.

The question that inspired this paper was extremely simple. Why would a stone fall?

Every person on the continent should be able to understand this simple problem, and this basic question was the basis of Link's entire thesis. However, the current state of the thesis had already contained ideas that were almost beyond the intellectual capabilities of a normal human.

Even if Link were to publish his paper to the world, there would only be a handful of people who would be able to understand it.

You could not even understand it even if he gave it to you for free. That was how arrogant the thesis itself was.

This situation was akin to letting an ordinary person on earth listen to a world-class physicist's deduction process of his theories. One would be lucky enough to recognize all the symbols they were looking at, much less understand the entire speech.

That was the truth about Link's thesis.

When Eliard came to visit a few days ago, he took a glance at Link's recent discoveries and gave up after half a minute. He then had a look of frustration on his face.

Herrera also used to be interested in the thesis. She would often request for the newest copy and even discuss with Link about the details of the thesis. However, ever since she got the latest paper a month ago which took her three whole days before she grazed the surface of the contents, she stopped reading the thesis entirely.

It was way too difficult. She felt as though her mind was exploding when she read it. It had turned from being a joyous task to one that was torturous.

Link could only depend on himself now that no one around him would be able to give any constructive comments anymore. He felt like he was walking in a pitch-black wilderness. What will he find and achieve? He had no idea.

After half an hour of deduction, Link arrived at a beautiful formula. It was the perfect expression for a spatial curl.

He admired his work, but his expression quickly turned pained. What a waste! This spatial curl can totally be the basis of an ultra-long-distance transmission machine. However, the required magic compression level is way too high. It is impossible for a human to reach that level of strength alone. They would need a variety of equipment made from extremely high-quality materials. I predict that 10000 gold coins would not even scratch the surface of the cost to build such a transmitter.

He could only temporarily shelf his idea as it would be impossible to realize this dream in the near future.

Link then continued expanding on his thesis and quickly became immersed in the process. He would often frown and had various quirky expressions on his face. Sometimes, he would put down his quill to wonder about the many mysteries he was going to discover, completely neglecting the passage of time.

After a while, Link arrived at another formula. His quill came to a sudden stop as he stared hard at his new product. Around ten minutes later, he broke out in laughter.

"The Gods have blessed me! I have been thinking about how to increase the spellcasting speed of the Titan's Hand. To think that I have achieved a breakthrough in my thesis!"

Link had already mastered the Level-6 spell Titan's Hand for a month. However, he had never used it in battle. Even when he was facing the demon in the Girvent Forest, he merely used the Level-5 spell, the Fire God Hand.

The sole reason for that was the slow casting speed. It needed a full five seconds for the spell to be fully formed. Amidst a battle between high-level opponents, this casting speed was simply a joke.

Unless someone was protecting him while he channeled the spell, this Level-6 spell had practically no actual combat value. Furthermore, there would always be shortcomings when one depended on another person for protection. Link hated the feeling when his life depended fully on the performance of others.

Hence, his main aim was to increase the Titan's Hand spellcasting speed. However, he had not been able to obtain a new Glyph of Soul from the in-game system. This greatly reduced the limit to which his spellcasting speed could be heightened. After half a month of research, he had only hastened the spellcasting time to four seconds.

The breakthrough that he got from the thesis was thus enough to make him ecstatic.

I know of a machine gun Supreme Magic Skill and a Glyph of Soul spell that could be released almost instantaneously. If I can combine them all together with the space dispersion field, I can reduce the casting time to less than a second!

The theory behind this was simple. Link would first release a Fire God Hand enchanted with his Supreme Magic Skill, the Machine Gun. Under the effect of the Glyph of Soul, he could almost release the Level-5 spell instantaneously. He would then cancel the Fire God Hand immediately which would trigger the magical resonance effect of the machine gun, creating a new Fire God Hand spell.

The original cause and effect would be that a Fire God Hand spell would call out another Fire God Hand spell. However, Link's idea was to make use of the space dispersion field effect to call out a Titan's Hand spell instead.

This would not be feasible for spells which were completely unrelated. However, the Fire God Hand spell and the Titan Hand spell were two almost homologous spells. It would totally work!

Link wasted no time and began to design the spell immediately.

He was the main architect of the Machine Gun, the Fire God Hand spell, the Titan Hand spell, as well as the space dispersion field. He thus had a good understanding of these respective components and began working quickly.

It took merely two hours for his design to take shape. By then, it was only 10 o'clock in the afternoon.

He checked his Mana Points and realized that it had already recovered to 600 points. Link thought for a moment and drank a mid-level Mana Recovery Potion to recover 500 Mana Points. He then dashed to the Heaven's Thorn excitedly. He desperately wanted to test out his hypothesis.

If he succeeded in this attempt, he would have made the record for the fastest Level-6 spell in the entire history of Firuman. Even those Magicians who had worn countless equipment that increased their spellcasting speed previously in the game were unable to reduce the spellcasting speed of Level-6 spells to less than two seconds. His hypothesis might allow him to release one almost instantaneously!

The world is really filled with possibilities! Link could not wait to get started.

He made a quick dash to the Heaven's Thorn. He was now a celebrity in the academy and would attract everyone's attention.

Many Magicians on the way would greet him to which he replied in kind. He then rushed off at an even faster speed, causing the Magicians on the way to have a perplexed expression on their faces.

"What is Link up to again?" Someone asked.

"He is the kind of person who only thinks about magic all day long. It is pretty boring to be honest." A beautiful female apprentice pouted.

"I remember you saying that he was charming last time. What happened? Did you get rejected?"

"None of your business!"

Link ignored all those statements and made a beeline for the Mage Tower. He was already panting and gasping for breath when he reached the Heaven's Thorn. After seeing Selasse, he immediately asked, "Is the sub-elemental pool empty?"

Selasse helplessly said, "Someone just entered. You'll have to wait for half an hour."

"Oh..." Link was disappointed. This was the inconvenience of not having a Mage Tower

of your own. One would have to wait even to further their own research. This made him desire his own Mage Tower even more.

Link could only wait.

However, Selsa then continued, "The dean had instructed me that if there is a need, you can use the main elemental pool reserved especially for him. It is currently empty."

Link's eyes glowed as he said, "Can I really?"

The main elemental pool in the Heaven's Thorn was Level-9 in strength and was termed the Celestial Pool. It was well-known throughout the entire Norton Kingdom and even the human race. The only other elemental pool that was comparable in strength was the elemental melting pot in the sky city that belonged to the Magician Alliance in the South. This Celestial Pool was usually reserved only for the dean's usage.

"Of course. It is the dean's instructions. I'll bring you there."

Link hastily followed behind.

The main elemental pool was on the fifth level. Link was dumbfounded by the spectacular sight.

The entire fifth floor was made up almost entirely by the Celestial Pool. The room was 500 square feet in size, and the elements amongst the pool seemed exceptionally concentrated. From afar, there seemed to be no fluctuations in the elements at all, much like staring into mirrors of many different colors. The materials used to ensure the stability of the magic formation were also extremely rare. This spectacular sight almost blinded Link.

In the fire elemental area, Link saw the Fire Star Thorium. In the water elemental area, he then saw the Aquatic Silver that was reflecting sapphire brilliance off one another ever so confidently. The earth elemental area naturally had the Fissure Crystal—they were all extremely expensive materials.

Link could not even begin to estimate the cost needed to create an elemental pool of such scale. This was the hallmark of a kingdom's strength, and definitely a strategic battle resource. Link had the confidence to build a Level-6 elemental pool from scratch. However, an elemental pool the level of the Celestial Pool was another

question altogether. Judging from Link's current strength, he could merely stare and watch in awe.

Let's stop thinking about it and start experimenting. Link took a deep breath and stepped into the elemental pool.

Selasse gently closed the door behind Link and immediately was inspired to write a new poem.

He took out his notebook and started writing with fervor.

He is always disheveled, his hair as messy as the beggars outside of town. However, an intellectual brilliance shines through his eyes. Today, he stepped into the Celestial Pool. What miracles will he create? Mortals should not hope to even understand or predict his actions, but simply exalt those that he will bring.

Chapter 181

The Calm Before the Storm

In the Celestial Pool of the Heaven's Thorn Mage Tower.

There weren't many innovative changes to the structural spell this time, so the whole modification process went smoothly. In merely one hour and a half, Link had completed his Supreme Magical Skills modification on the spell to improve its spellcasting speed.

And now, it was time for him to give it a final test.

Vulcan's Hand!

As soon as the thought emerged in Link's mind, the Glyph of Soul caused a momentary stun throughout Link's body for a fraction of a second, then the spell structure of Vulcan's Hand emerged fully formed on the surface for the controlling magic seal. Just before the fire elements began to coalesce, Link halted the process abruptly, and in that instance the Machine Gun Supreme Magical Skill took effect and his Mana began to reverberate!

The surface of the magic seal flashed in a dim white light, which was then closely followed by the emergence of the Level-6 Titan's Hand and the roaring fire elements which then gathered and converged to form a miniature version of the Titan's Hand.

Link then tested a variety of movements using this miniature Titan's Hand. Eventually he tried about 200 different movements with it and they were all a success.

It's finally perfect, thought Link with a smile. After all the experiments, his Mana had been depleted down to less than 200 points. Had he not drunk a vial of potion before, it would've been down to zero by now.

Just at the moment when he stopped the spell, a flash of light appeared on the interface. Link took a look at it and discovered that it was a congratulatory notification.

Player successfully broke through the spellcasting speed limit for Level-6 spells. 50

Omni Points rewarded.

Player successfully created a new Supreme Magical Skill—Inter-Spell Resonance. 20 Omni Points rewarded.

With 70 newly earned Omni Points, added to his existing 150 points, Link now had 220 Omni Points. He was always careful not to spend too much of his Omni Points as they might come in handy during emergencies.

"Since you caught me breaking through the limits," he said to the gaming system, "that must mean that you recorded my spellcasting time. So how long exactly did I take?"

0.65 seconds. You have the potential to decrease it further by 0.1 seconds.

Link was very satisfied with 0.65 seconds. It was fast enough even if he had to fight against a Level-6 Warrior. As for the potential to decrease it further by 0.1 seconds, Link was sure that he would achieve that naturally just by practicing anyway. Thus, Link made a decision to call it a day. He looked at the time and realized that it was only half an hour before noon. He'd been busy all morning, and his stomach began to rumble in hunger, so he left the Celestial Pool to get himself an early lunch.

When he reached the great hall on the first floor of the Mage Tower, Link noticed the servants bringing food to the table. Selasse and the dean's other disciples were all at the table ready to start the meal.

"Link!" Selasse greeted Link when he noticed him. "Want to have a meal together?"

Link thought it rude to refuse. Besides, it wouldn't be his first time to dine here at the dean's Mage Tower, so he went over to Selasse and the rest of the Magicians there and joined them at the table. The servants then promptly provided him with a plate and a set of cutlery.

"Have you been so busy that you can't even trim your beard, Link?" a Level-5 Magician called Ivan teased.

Link immediately cast a magic mirror and checked himself with it. At a glance his craggy unkempt face with his untrimmed beard made it seemed as if he'd aged ten years in the last month!

"Ah, you're right!" said Link. "I guess it's time for me to visit the barber!"

"You can cut your hair anyway you want," said Selasse, "but don't completely shave off all of your beard. Otherwise you'd look like a teenaged boy and no one would believe your actual skill level and they might underestimate you!"

The Magicians around all nodded in agreement to Selasse's remarks. Link felt quite uncomfortable having his beard being the center of attention. He mumbled a few words in acknowledgment then pounced on the bread rolls which had just been served up by the servants.

"I'm starving! Let's eat!" said Link enthusiastically, eager to change the subject, to which all the Magicians at the table erupted in laughter.

During the meal, a few of them didn't just talk about magic and spells but chatted about their past experiences as well. All of them were the dean's disciples and they were all in their prime, the oldest being only 41 years old. With the exception of the poet Selasse, these Magicians were all of Level-4 and above. They've all traveled extensively and had seen much of the outside world. Most of them had achieved glorious fame and reputation and were regarded as the Elite Magicians among the human realm.

Link listened keenly to the tales told by these Magicians and gained a lot of new insights from their adventures and rich experiences.

"Have any of you heard," said Ivan suddenly, "of the rumored signs of a high-level demons in the capital city of Leo Kingdom by the Southern Magician Alliance?"

"How reliable is the rumor?" said Selasse, doubtful of the story's veracity. If there really were high-level demons, they would've caused certain cataclysms that would be hard to miss. Yet, the academy had not heard of such reports recently.

Link's ears pricked up at the mention of this strange incidence. To his knowledge, no high-level demons should appear around this time. Even if they did, shouldn't they be found here in Norton Kingdom? Why did they turn up in the South instead?

"Who cares how reliable it was?" said Ivan, who at the time had thought nothing of the rumor other than an amusing hearsay. "It's none of our business anyway. I hear there were signs of not just one demon, but three of them! And you wouldn't believe this, but they said one of those demons was so beautiful she managed to charm Wavier's socks off! You all know the Wavier, the Magician in the South, don't you?"

"Of course," replied another Level-4 Magician named Arthur. "He's the darling of the Magician Alliance!"

"Let me tell you," continued Ivan with a mischievous smirk, "they also said that Wavier was so besotted with the she-demon that he was soon overcome by lovesickness and didn't care to sleep nor eat! He'd gotten so thin now that the president of the alliance got so worried his hair turned white within weeks!"

"What a character!" exclaimed Arthur with a hearty laugh. "This Wavier was reported to be a man whose talents the world hadn't seen in a century, but who would've thought that his taste in women was just as unique!"

Several other Magicians broke out in laughter at this remark as they all took this rumor to merely be a funny story. Only Link sat there quietly focusing on the food on his plate. He had, in truth, sank deep into thought and was brooding about the rumor from the South.

A high-level demon beautiful enough to charm Wavier off his wits, mused Link, could it be Celine? Link suspected that this she-demon in the rumors must really be Celine, and the other two must've been the demon soldiers her father had ordered to capture her back to the abyss.

Link wasn't too pleased to hear of Wavier's lovesick behaviors. He was also greatly disturbed by the thoughts of Celine being all alone while two of her father's demon soldiers were pursuing her aggressively. If only he could drop everything and run to the South to find her now!

But he knew full well he couldn't do that. Not while the academy was still shadowed by the threat of the Black Moon Conspiracy and the release of the demon Tarviss. Yet knowing this didn't make him feel the urge to go to Celine less in any way at all.

After that, when Ivan and the other Magicians had moved on to other topics Link couldn't pay attention to a word they said any longer. He wolfed down his food, said goodnight to everyone, and left the Heaven's Thorn alone.

The sun still hung high in the sky when he came out of the Mage Tower. The glorious sunshine and the fact that he had solved the spellcasting problem of the Titan's Hand had coupled to loosen Link up gradually. He took a walk around the academy for more than ten minutes, then when he walked past a barbershop he was suddenly reminded

of Ivan and Selasse's remarks on his appearance. Celine wouldn't like to see me looking this haggard either, Link thought. And so, he decided to enter the barbershop and have his hair and beard sorted out somehow.

In the end, Link had his hair cut and his beard slightly trimmed. He now looked as if he could be about 23 or 24 years old. He walked out of the barbershop feeling like a new person, ready to go back to the Mage Tower to continue studying his magic textbooks.

To his surprise, he met Herrera and Rylai on his way back. They were holding hands and strolling towards Bryant's Inspiration Courtyard, looking as if they were taking a casual stroll after the meal to admire the beautiful scenes of spring.

Rylai called out to Link immediately as she noticed him. Herrera, on the other hand, seemed to see through Link's worries and anxiety after taking a glance at him.

"You've been so busy lately," said Herrera, "why don't we take a walk together to the square considering how beautiful the weather is today?"

Herrera thought it would be such a shame if one was to stay cooped up in the Mage Tower when spring had bloomed so beautifully after a season of harsh winter.

After a moment's consideration Link nodded and agreed to accompany the two women for a walk to Bryant's Inspiration Courtyard. He needed some time to relax and clear his mind after all, so a short walk wouldn't hurt.

Once they reached the outskirts of the courtyard, bunches of bright yellow catkins rushed up into view and the fresh fragrance of the newly grown grass and leaves filled the air. Rylai fluttered about the courtyard like a butterfly while Link and Herrera walked slowly behind her, chatting freely.

"The dean told me that you've mastered a Level-6 spell," said Herrera suddenly. "Is it true?"

"Yes, it's the Fist of Firomoz," said Link with a nod, seeing no point in hiding it from Herrera. "I've managed to modify its spell structure as well."

Herrera sighed after hearing Link's reply.

"I have nothing more to teach you, then," she said. "I don't think it would do you any

more good to keep on staying in my little Mage Tower either. Have you any plans for the future?"

The question had been on Link's mind a lot lately. As his level continued to increase, his repertoire of spells became more and more complex as well. The East Cove Magic Academy might have a wealth of rare and valuable textbooks, but Link feared they were still insufficient in quenching his thirst for more knowledge. He found that he couldn't find any books that would answer his questions as easily as he did before. More and more now it was up to his own reasoning and experiments that would solve the problems he faced in magic theories and spells.

Could it be time for him to graduate from this magic academy?

"My estate was almost completely purged of robbers and bandits now," said Link after a moment of silence. "I think it's time I leave the academy and focus on building my estate after April 15th."

Another plan on his mind that he didn't mention to Herrera was his resolution to go south after the affairs of his estate had been straightened out. He must find Celine somehow.

"Not a bad idea," said Herrera, half expecting Link's answer. "The Ferde Wilderness isn't so far away from here. If there's any problem at all just send a letter and I will do my best to help you."

"Thank you, tutor," replied Link sincerely. Herrera had been a great help to him ever since he started learning magic. He didn't think it would be possible to advance to Level-6 so quickly had it not been for Herrera's selfless and patient guidance.

"Don't mention it," said Herrera with a gentle smile. "I only did what I should as a tutor."

Just then, the sound of Rylai's sparkling laughter reached their ears. When they turned to her direction, they discovered that she was happily playing with a magic kite that a Magician's Apprentice had just given her.

As they looked further, they saw how there were many other Magician's Apprentices in the courtyard enjoying themselves with their own magical toys as well. Some had kites just like the one Rylai was playing with, while others brought their own magical dolls or magical pets. Those who were slightly older either took a walk around the

square or stood there watching the younger ones play with relaxed and happy faces. Everyone seemed to be basking in the magnificent early spring weather, giving the atmosphere an overall pleasant and cordial air.

Link drank up the jolly sight in front of him with a light heart for a while. But gradually the unnerving anxiety that bubbled underneath began to rise up to the surface, and the sight before him ceased to be pleasant anymore.

In the game in his previous life, Bryant's Inspiration Courtyard at this moment had become a wasteland with a huge gaping hole in its middle, while the Mage Towers around it that once stood tall and proud had been reduced to ashes and rubbles. All the trees within the area of the academy were leveled to the ground, the fresh blooming flowers were withered and trampled on and the entire ground of the academy was covered in a layer of dark greenish-black aura.

Corpses of dead Magicians were strewn all across the entire area, most of them were too disfigured to identify. Chief among them was the corpse of Anthony the academy's dean, whose body was riddled with holes because he had burnt his own soul as the last resort to fight against the demon Tarviss. Strangely enough, his body still stood there stiffly, his eyes were now hollow and blackened by the fire that burned his soul, yet they were frozen there, looking over at the scene of the academy's total destruction before him.

It was a scene full of sorrow and despair.

The East Cove Magic Academy's obliteration was a huge blow to the Norton Kingdom's overall strength. Because of this, the kingdom was in shortage of powerful Magicians who would've been a crucial strength in the war and the kingdom was so weakened that it collapsed under the Dark Elves' attacks, never to rise up again.

Will the same thing happen again this time? Link couldn't help but worry.

Link had no answer to this question. The mission of investigating the Black Moon Conspiracy still remained unsolved in the gaming system, proving that the enemy was still moving the plot forward in ways that Link hadn't yet discovered.

If the demon Tarviss was released, how will I fight against him? The best thing to do is to lure it out of the academy and kill him then, but will I succeed? Who knows...all I can do is to give it everything I've got and fight to the death...

"Link... Link!" said Herrera just as Link was deep in thoughts. "What's wrong?"

"Huh?" Link was suddenly jolted back to reality. Herrera's flawless face was illuminated by the brilliant sunlight right in front of his eyes, yet Link could detect a tinge of worry in her expressions.

"It's nothing," said Link shaking his head. "I was just thinking about the demon Tarviss. What if..."

"There are no more what ifs about that!" Herrera interrupted, her eyebrows furrowed but she shook her head assuringly. "The academy has undertaken the best security measures. Even if Tarviss was released, we are now well-equipped and ready to face him!"

Link nodded. He was slightly pacified by Herrera's assurances. He'd changed many things ever since arriving in this world. Besides, he wasn't fighting alone, there were many powerful people fighting against the forces of darkness just like him. Furthermore, he now had the help of the Prophetic Stone, so there really was no need to worry himself sick.

"Tutor! Aunt Herrera!" cried Rylai as she ran towards both of them with a face that shone with happiness. "Come, follow me! There are Golden Orchids in full bloom over there. They are just the loveliest things!"

A Golden Orchid was a rare plant species that was renowned in Firuman for its beautiful and dignified flowers. It was also the national flower of the Norton Kingdom.

Rylai's joy and innocence were so infectious that Link and Herrera were soon in a much better mood. They both cast away their gloomy worries for the future and followed the girl with smiles on their faces.

When the future generations looked back at the history of the East Cove Magic Academy through the archives, they would remember this day as the last glimmer of peace and harmony before the dark days that were to come.

The 18th of March, the 1057th year of the Holy Calendar, marked the first day of the war between the Dark Army and the Realm of Light. It was known throughout history as the Spring Night Battle. The day was filled with joy and harmony, but no one knew that it had been the last moments of calm before the monstrous storm that was to hit. Apart from a handful of high-level members in the academy, almost no one knew that

there was a looming darkness that was about to engulf the academy and indeed, the whole Realm of Light.

On this fateful night, a diabolical storm swept across the East Cove Magic Academy. Many young Magicians died in their sleep, oblivious to the end of what had snatched their young lives so quickly in the silence of the night. Several Mage Towers that once stood so majestically were razed to the ground.

This was also the day the Magician Link Morani unleashed his unrivaled power for the first time. This battle had thrust him officially onto the stage of warfare between the good forces of light and the evil forces of darkness, marking the day when the first lines of his own epic poem were written down. —Selassee Moormont, historian and Magician of the East Cove Higher Magic Academy.

Chapter 182

The Black Moon Conspiracy

Link managed to take a break from his hectic schedule for two hours under Herrera's invitation. He then returned to the Mage Tower to do some casual reading and even slept early at eight o' clock. It was a relaxing day.

Link originally thought he could have a good rest all the way till the next morning. However, his heart palpitated at an insane rate in the middle of his sleep. He screamed and sat up immediately in shock.

He then touched the back of his pajamas and found it to be soaked in cold sweat. He could also still feel the effects of the frantic palpitation he experienced. It did not reduce in intensity despite the fact that he had awakened.

Magicians possessed strong souls and would never feel flustered for no reason at all, even more so for powerful Magicians like Link. This sudden outburst of panic must definitely be some kind of premonition. Link's soul had been strengthened by the God of Light and had reached the level of a sacred spirit. Herrera had personally validated the fact. His intuition to danger was thus unusually strong.

He immediately donned his blue magic robe and opened the curtains to take a look outside. It was completely dark, and nothing could be seen. Link spun and looked at the clock before realizing it was ten minutes to midnight.

At that moment, as Link was starting to get sober, the feeling of panic had begun to subside. If an ordinary Magician were to encounter such a situation, they would probably doubt their own judgment and miss the best chance to escape.

However, Link was different. He was sure that something dangerous was approaching. Seeing no suspicious movements through his window, Link rushed out of his room after taking his wand and Prophet's White Stone. He then checked his Mana Points.

Only half full at 1500 points? That is not enough! Link wanted to replenish his Mana Points using a mid-level Mana Recovery Potion. However, he put the potion back into his dimensional pendant after some thought.

His Mana Recovery Speed was 200 points per hour. He also had 220 spare Omni Points which would allow him to instantly refill his Mana Points if needed. The potion should only be used if he was left with no choice.

Link headed for the highest floor of the Mage Tower without hesitation. He ran all the way to the top and reached Herrera's doorstep half a minute later. He then raised his wand and tapped the runes on the door frantically.

The runes started sounding in succession, accurately reflecting the panic in Link's heart.

"Who is there!" Herrera's voice was transmitted through the magic runes.

"Mentor, it's me!" Link shouted.

Ten seconds later, the door opened. Herrera appeared only wearing a nightgown with her hair disheveled, holding her crystal staff defensively. Link noticed that her forehead was also drenched in perspiration, her eyes shining with fear.

"Mentor, you had a nightmare as well?" Link asked. Sudden palpitations and nightmares were premonitions that Magicians would get in the face of impending danger.

Herrera nodded. "I dreamed that the academy was in flames. A few people were laughing wildly, but there were bodies everywhere! It was too terrible!" Herrera's voice trembled as she spoke. It was clear that the dream was emotionally traumatizing.

Powerful Magicians seldom dreamed. However, once they did, their sightings would often come true, especially those with a strong connection to their life.

Link immediately said, "Mentor, I am afraid this is the Black Moon Conspiracy. We have to take precautions!"

Herrera was startled for a moment but quickly recollected herself. She used a hairband to tie her disheveled hair into a ponytail and tapped her staff lightly on her shoulders. Similar to the time when she gave chase to Bale, her nightgown was immediately replaced by a blue battle magic robe.

Link could not help but catch a glimpse of Herrera's body once more. Fortunately, he

had experience with this spell and immediately shifted his gaze.

Herrera took ten seconds to change before speaking, "Let's go to the rooftop and see what's going on."

"Alright."

The size of Herrera's Mage Tower was not huge. However, it was still decent in terms of height. Standing 60 feet tall, one would be able to get a bird's eye view of the entire academy, apart from the Heaven's Thorn and the Spiral Mage Tower.

The two of them quickly reached the rooftop. For some reason, the darkness was especially suffocating, and despite being extremely dark, the moon and the stars were not visible. It seemed as though the sky was shrouded in a thick layer of clouds, though closer inspection would suggest that the air did not contain the oppressive feeling usually present during a cloudy night.

It was indeed very strange.

Standing on the rooftop, the two of them cast their views across the entire academy.

"The Eye of the Civet!" A pale, yellow light appeared at the tip of Link's staff, and two wisps floated into their bodies. Their eyes were then immediately shrouded in a faint amber glow.

The Eye of the Civet

Level-2 spell

Effect: Gives the user cat-like night vision and allows them to see through the oppressive darkness

This Level-2 spell was something that Link learned in his spare time. With his strong magic foundation, he could learn a low-level spell simply in a few attempts. It was not something that would take up a lot of time and effort.

Under the effect of the spell, their field of vision immediately became clear. The academy was displayed as a clear, black and white world.

The Revelation Square that was crowded in the morning was totally empty. The entire

academy was also extremely silent. After circling her gaze around the academy, Herrera shook her head, "I see nothing special. What about you?"

Link similarly saw nothing out of the ordinary. However, the rooftop of every other Mage Tower was similarly bustling with activity. People could be seen staring down from the rooftops, and faint magic rays were also present.

"Look, it's the other mentors; they have also felt the danger!" Link exclaimed.

The East Cove Higher Magic Academy was not a low-level Magic Academy like Flemmings. It was filled with powerful Magicians who naturally had a stronger premonition for danger. However, as they could not figure out the exact source of threat, everyone had gone to the rooftop to observe.

At that moment, a giant light ball appeared above the Heaven's Thorn. This light ball was like the sun, slowly rising to the point of 600 feet above the ground. This light ball illuminated the entire East Cove Higher Magic Academy.

"Mentor released a giant illumination spell. He had also sensed the danger." Herrera seemed to have calmed down slightly. With the help of a Leve-7 Magician, the academy should be safe.

Link nodded. It seemed that his warnings were being taken seriously. After the academy went into red alert, their crisis reaction speed had increased exponentially. This was excellent.

In the game, one of the main reasons the academy suffered such a tragic defeat was due to inadequate preparation. When they realized that Magician Bale was dabbling into dark magic, the council immediately went to confront him which caused him to go berserk. Bale then accidentally smashed the seal that contained Tarviss, giving the academy no time to react.

This time, the academy had made ample preparations. There should not be any problems.

In response to the giant illumination spell cast by Anthony, all the other Magicians stopped concealing their magic presence. In an instant, powerful magic fluctuations covered the entire school, much like candle lights in the night.

Herrera also released her full power, causing the air around the rooftop to become

distorted. Link estimated that her Maximum Mana would be around 2800 Mana Points. Standing in the midst of this distortion, Link felt as though he was trapped in a heatwave, the constant splitting of images making him dizzy.

This scene was much more intimidating than the one where Bale's chief disciple Darris tried to exert pressure on him in the corridor. This carried on for about three seconds. After the signal was released, Herrera once again concealed her power, and the air around the rooftop became normal again.

However, the moment the air ripples disappeared, Link felt something was amiss.

Link immediately turned to look at the suspicious area. At the edges where the giant light ball could barely reach, there was supposed to be a white tower. However, other than a ball of darkness, there was nothing.

Link originally thought he was mistaken. After checking it for a few times, he then gasped in horror. The white tower had disappeared

"Where is the white tower?" Link pointed to the general direction while asking Herrera.

"What white tower? Oh you mean the Tower of Azula...hey...where is the white tower?" Herrera exclaimed, clearly shocked by the disappearance as well.

The white tower was not a conspicuous building, especially in the night. However, as much as it wasn't eye-catching, it could not have disappeared into thin air. The Tower of Azula had imprisoned countless demons and powerful creatures. If anything happened, it would be a total disaster!

When Link and Herrera were still in shock, a ferocious roar could be heard coming from the direction where the Tower of Azula once stood. A huge sonic wave traveled towards the direction of the academy.

"I am finally free!"

Link then saw a 12-foot-tall Giant Cyan Tiger leaping out of the shadows. This tiger was surrounded by translucent cyan flames and ran at breakneck speed. It charged straight towards the academy the moment it was released.

"Little guys, I am here for your brains!" The tiger laughed hysterically, leaving air

ripples behind him as he charged at a pace faster than sound. It was an extremely intimidating momentum.

Herrera paled upon seeing this creature. She said in a trembling voice, "It is a Wind Tiger, a Level-6 Magical Creature..."

The tiger itself was not the reason she had such a horrified expression. It was because the appearance of this tiger could only mean one thing —the Tower of Azula was already destroyed.

Sure enough, after the appearance of the Wind Tiger, many shadows emerged, each one of them having a strength equivalent to that of a Level-6 professional. There was a total of 20 shadows that appeared, five of which even had the magic presence of a Level-7 professional.

This was a terrifying sight.

Link felt terrified as well. However, he said optimistically, "Although there are a lot of powerful people, we have our Mage Towers. They will not be able to breakthrough our defenses!"

The moment he said those words, a huge explosion happened on Bryant's Revelation Square. A huge crater appeared as rubble flew in all directions. An almost suffocating presence could be felt from the crater. This presence was so concentrated it almost felt like a solid object. It was filled with bloodthirst, chaos, and rage. As the presence swept through the Mage Towers, it caused great emotional damage to all Magicians. Even Dean Anthony was unable to escape the wrath of this presence, his giant illumination spell instantly extinguished by this overwhelming force.

Herrera looked as though she was going to faint, muttering, "Tarviss, Level-8 in strength...he has escaped."

Chapter 183

The Terrifying Giant Demon!

At the East Cove Magic Academy.

Because of Tarviss' sudden appearance, the Magicians of the academy had been rooted to the spot with fear and terror. Even the prisoners who had just broken free from the Azura Tower weren't pleased with the sight of the demon's release.

"Lord of Light, what have I gotten myself into?" remarked an escaped Level-6 Magician prisoner. "I'm not staying here!" The Magician then cast a flying spell and took off into the sky, fleeing the scene as far and as quickly as he possibly could.

"I'm no match for this demon," said another escaped prisoner who was a Level-7 Necromancer. "Gentlemen, let's hope we never meet again!" Suddenly, a pair of wings flapped open on his back, and he flapped the wings a few times before taking off into the air just like the previous prisoner, leaving the academy within seconds.

The rest of the escaped Magicians responded similarly. They'd finally regained their freedom after being locked away in that damned tower for centuries; there was no way they would act like fools and stay here in the academy and face certain death.

In just a few seconds after the release of the demon Tarviss, only three of the escaped Magicians were left. Of the three, one was Bale who was controlled by Manrod, another was the Level-7 Lich, and the third was a Level-6 Magician.

Oh, and of course there was the roaring magical tiger who charged straight towards the East Cove Magic Academy the moment he gained freedom, hell-bent on getting his revenge. He didn't retreat for a single step after the appearance of the demon Tarviss. Instead, he was excited to see such a powerful potential ally.

"Excellent," he said enthusiastically. "I was just in need of a strong ally! You must be the demon Tarviss. Good! I will stand by you tonight, and we'll devour all of these puny Magicians!"

The magical tiger's voice was loud enough that all three Magicians at the Azura Tower

heard him clearly. They fell into momentary silence after hearing the tiger's words.

"I bet," said the Level-7 Lich finally, "the little kitten will get trampled to death by Tarviss soon.

"Haha, no," said the Level-6 occult Magician. "Lord Tarviss will utilize the tiger's power while it is still useful. Only when he is no longer of any value to him will he then eat it up." The occult Magician was only wearing a pair of pants while his upper body was completely naked, exposing a body ripped with muscles and dark brown skin. Countless occultic runes covered his whole body, and his eyes were pure onyx black without any signs of the white of the eyes. These features of his cut a strikingly peculiar figure even among all the other prisoners of the Azura Tower.

Manrod, on the other hand, had little interest in the Wind Tiger's fate. He stared at the other two Magicians there and laughed.

"I know you," he said, "aren't you the Bloodmage Talon?"

"Indeed, I am," replied the occult Magician with a laugh. "I didn't expect anyone to still remember me even after two hundred years."

"Of course you're still remembered," said Manrod. "You are, after all, the Magician who sacrificed thousands of souls to the demon god in the Leo Kingdom in the South. You are infamous all over the big continent. Although, I don't understand why they didn't completely purge your body and soul..."

"Purge me?" replied Talon with a sneer before continuing with boastful pride. "They wanted to do that, for sure, but they didn't have enough power to do so. You may think that I'm just a Level-6 Magician, so I couldn't have been all that powerful. But the Master had bestowed me with an undying soul. That meant that if they destroyed my body, all they would achieve was to unshackle my soul from its bodily prison so I would be invincible and free! Hahaha!"

"Undying soul?" said Manrod, who then nodded. "Not a bad deal at all. Are you staying here for revenge?"

"Why else?" replied Talon. "I've been locked up in here for 200 years. Now that I've got my freedom back and even got to meet Lord Tarviss—what better time to take sweet revenge?" Then, Talon rushed straight towards the site where Tarviss was emerging.

Manrod then turned towards the Level-7 Lich.

"What about you?" he asked. "Why are you still here?"

The Lich turned around to face Manrod. His bluish ghostly flames in his hollow eye sockets flickered as he let out a cold, mirthless chuckle in answer to Manrod's question.

"I'm only a casual observer," said the Lich.

Manrod recognized the Lich the moment he heard his voice.

"You're Vance!" he said. "The man in the prison who didn't want to escape!"

"You're right," replied the Lich. Suddenly his body was blanketed in a layer of pale white mist, and from the thick mist emerged a hazy voice that said, "I have a feeling that Tarviss will die tonight. I can't wait to see how he'll die..."

As he spoke, the Lich's body gradually faded from view and blended into the mist. Shortly after, the mist itself slowly dissipated. When it vanished completely, the Lich was gone as well.

Manrod knew, though, that the Lich didn't go anywhere. He was still around here, masking his presence and aura.

"What a strange fellow," said Manrod with a shrug. He took no notice of the Lich's words. If Tarviss was alone in facing the attacks from the whole academy tonight, there might've been a slim chance of him dying. But Tarviss wasn't alone. The academy would have to face Manrod as well.

Manrod controlled Bale's body and rushed straight into the heart of the East Cove Academy, ready to help Tarviss.

Black fog billowed out of the giant gaping pit in the middle of Bryant's Inspiration Courtyard. Everything that came into contact with this black fog was destroyed—the trees and plants wilted and withered, and even the dirt turned into black ashes. In a short period, the square had completely turned into a blackened wasteland.

Although it was a horrifying sight, this was the best opportunity to attack Tarviss. The Magicians of the East Cove Magic Academy were no cowards. They sensed that it was

the best moment to defeat the demon and reacted accordingly.

"Attack!!!"

Then, an eye-catching column of light emerged out of Heaven's Thorn that focused on the hole in the square—it was a signal for the target of the Magicians' attack.

Shortly after, a large beam of light with a diameter of more than 10 feet rose from the tops of the six Mage Towers. Each light beam from each Mage Tower was of a different color—there was green, blue, yellow, white, red and gold—each representing a type of element.

These light beams pierced through the clouds and converged 500 feet into the sky into a dark purple beam of light that was about 70 feet in diameter. The power of this combined elemental light energy was so great that the Magicians could feel the warmth emanating from it from the ground. The light beam was so intense that it brightened up the whole sky until the night seemed to have turned to day!

But that wasn't all.

The position of the light beam was right above the Heaven's Thorn, where another intense white beam of light emerged and converged with the dark purple beam. Immediately afterwards, a tsunami of Mana fluctuation spread out from this light beam. The whole sky seemed to have become agitated by it, so much so that flocks of birds took up to the sky and fled away from the nearby Girvent Forest while wild animals there were driven to panic in droves as well. Even the inhabitants of the River Cove Town could feel the unsettling vibrations in the air at the time.

This was Anthony's prepared attack to fight against the demon Tarviss. He had borrowed the power of the six Mage Towers of the academy and his own Heaven's Thorn's strength to synchronize and combine into a formidable Level-8 attack spell!

The dark purple light beam in the sky began to oscillate. Then, after two seconds the multi-element light beam of more than 10 feet in diameter struck precisely at the hole in the center of the Inspiration Courtyard.

It was the joint attack that accumulated all the power of the entire East Cove Academy, and it hit directly at the demon Tarviss just as he was still inside the hole before he was completely unfettered—there was no way for him to escape this attack!

But then, an unexpected accident occurred.

When the light beam was half-formed, a strange silvery mirror suddenly appeared in the sky. This mirror was very thin and was almost unnoticeable, but it was far from weak and fragile. Not only did it stop the light beam completely from piercing through it, but the light beam was also reflected on the mirror's surface, and the direction of the light beam was deflected away from the hole where the demon was chained.

It was now directed towards the Heaven's Thorn!

Crash!!!

Although the dean, Anthony had cast a defensive spell around the Mage Tower earlier, it was only a Level-7 spell which was as protective as a thin film of soap in the face of the Level-8 combined attack of the entire Magic Academy. The light beam pierced straight through the shield and the Mage Tower and was directed precisely at the Celestial Pool inside.

The Celestial Pool contained a huge reserve of elements which were aggressively agitated by the Level-8 light beam. A series of explosions followed, causing crucial damage to the structure of the Heaven's Thorn.

Then, under the heavy stares of the Magicians across the academy, the towering Heaven's Thorn which had stood proudly for hundreds of years was snapped in two from the middle!

A few seconds after that, there was a burst of the dean's aura. Just before the explosion started, though, the aura then disappeared completely.

"No!!!!" shouted Herrera.

The Elemental Pool was the core of every Mage Tower. The dean must have been in the Celestial Pool in order for him to unleash such an immense burst of aura that Herrera had detected just now. And now that the Elemental Pool of Heaven's Thorn had been attacked and multiple eruptions had spread throughout the tower from it, something terrible must've befallen the dean!

Even Link was shocked by this turn of events. He had felt a sense of relief when he sensed the sheer power of the dark purple light beam and had allowed himself to hope that Tarviss would surely be defeated by this attack. It was, after all, an attack that was

on par with a Level-8 spell which was certainly a match for the Level-8 demon. Who was to expect that it would be reflected and redirected to the main source of the academy's power—the dean's Mage Tower?

There wasn't a shadow of a doubt in the minds of everyone present—the Heaven's Thorn would surely collapse!

"Farewell, Anthony," said Manrod with a confident smile as he stood in the willow woods watching the Heaven's Thorn tumbling down from its heights and burn to ruins.

As he spoke, the physical body that he embodied began to rot and wither at a rapid speed. In no time, all that was left was a puddle of blood and gore. Manrod had burned Bale's soul and thoroughly exhausted the physical and spiritual capabilities of this body to cast a Level-8 spell—the Ultra Reflector.

Ultra Reflector

Level-8

Effects: Reflects and redirects an attacking spell towards the direction that the spellcaster desired. Especially useful against light elemental spells.

With just one move, Manrod had successfully killed Anthony who was the academy's most powerful Magician and also destroyed the East Cove Magic Academy's most powerful Mage Tower!

There was now no leader among the East Cove Academy Magicians now. Not only that, but they've also lost their strongest attack power. Now, Manrod believed, the Level-8 demon Tarviss would teach them a lesson they would never forget!

Right at the moment, the East Cove Academy Magicians were stunned by the horrific turn of events, a deep, terrifying, earth-shattering voice came out from the big gaping hole in the middle of the square.

"Finally... Freedom!!!!"

Immediately afterwards, a huge hand that was nearly two feet long emerged and clawed at the edge of the hole, sending dust and debris flying. Then, another hand emerged, followed by an unimaginably huge head.

Eventually, a colossal demon whose body was about 22 feet tall stood in the middle of the Inspiration Courtyard. The demon's skin was ember red, with many fleshy tentacles on his chin. There were countless dark gold magic runes, and his body emanated a black flame-like dark aura while his blood-red eyes reflected a three-foot-long light column.

Although Tarviss had been sealed in the hole for 400 years, his strength was still at Level-8—he was definitely still the strongest and most formidable being in Firuman!

For a time, the entire East Cove Magic Academy fell into an eerie silence. Even the Wind Tiger who had been so bold a few moments ago stopped dead in his tracks and began to instinctively step backwards. The demon might not be that much bigger than it, but he was emanating such an intimidating aura that was simply petrifying!

The demon's loud voice resounded across the academy. Tarviss apparently still remembered his arch nemesis Bryant as the first thing that came to his mind the moment he was released was to take revenge!

"Where is Bryant?" shouted the demon. "Where is he hiding?"

No one answered his question. The Bloodmage Talon was already kneeling on the ground in front of Tarviss, worshipping him.

Even Herrera herself was shocked witless by this colossal demon. Her eyes were opened wide as she stared haplessly at the demon while Link was at her side repeatedly trying to shake her back to her senses.

"Tutor!" cried Link urgently. "The Mage Tower isn't safe anymore. We must direct everyone to leave this place!"

Now that the Heaven's Thorn had collapsed, no other Mage Towers in the academy had enough power to stop Tarviss anymore. If they remained in the Mage Tower, there would only be one outcome for them—death!

And sure enough, just as Link finished the sentence, Tarviss who was getting more and more angry as he got no response to his questions suddenly lunged forward. The dark demonic power around his body had condensed into an unimaginably gigantic black shadow that was about a hundred feet tall. This humongous shadow collided head-on with a Mage Tower nearby.

Crash!!!!

The Mage Tower fell as if it was a toy at the impact of the collision with the demon.

Who could stop such unworldly strength?

Herrera was jolted back to her senses and rushed down the rooftop and began to direct all the Magician's apprentices in her Mage Tower to flee immediately. In that chaos, she did not notice that Link had not followed her down the rooftop. He stayed there and watched the total carnage caused by the demon Tarviss across the East Cove Magic Academy. He listened to the dying screams that emerged from the collapsed Mage Towers. Then, his eyes began to focus, and all his attention was intensified on one thing.

He was now in the absolutely calm state of spellcasting.

Chapter 184

The Slayer's Hand

The East Cove Higher Magic Academy, Midnight

Tarviss strode ferociously towards the Pivotal Mage Tower. Along the way, he swung his arms wildly which caused the demonic forces surrounding him to also destroy everything in sight. An ordinary Mage Tower was immediately severed into two pieces, causing the elemental pools to explode and the cries of fear to intensify. The East Cove Higher Magic Academy was in total chaos.

"Bryant, if you continue to hide, I will destroy this place together with the people!" Tarviss shouted.

He naturally didn't get his response; Bryant was no longer in this world. This made Tarviss even more enraged.

The Mage Towers were not simply standing there and waiting to be destroyed. They were actually retaliating with their offensive magic spells, shooting Level-6 spells towards Tarviss consecutively. However, in the face of a Level-8 demon, these Level-6 spells were merely a bunch of fireworks. They could not even penetrate through the demonic forces that were surrounding Tarviss.

At that moment, every Magician in the academy had the same questions in their mind.

Who could stop this demon? Is Dean Anthony still alive?

Dean Anthony was the psychological pillar of the academy. No one knew whether he survived the assault of the Level-8 spell. The appearance of this terrifying demon had further plunged the Magicians into despair. Many had already given up hope.

But, the truth was that Anthony was still alive.

At the last moment, Anthony teleported away from the Heaven's Thorn. He was currently around 0.6 miles away from the academy. Although he escaped the majority of the attack, his teleportation spell still took a bit too long to cast. In that moment, he

suffered some drastic injuries from the shockwaves of the Level-8 spell.

When the shockwaves reached him, the defensive spell in the elemental pool automatically defended against some of the impact. However, the Level-8 spell managed to penetrate through the barrier and grazed his body, causing his legs to vaporize almost immediately.

He was now lying in the Girvent Forest, gasping for breath from the pain in his legs. He was on the verge of losing his consciousness.

But he persevered.

Five seconds later, Anthony moved. The Legendary staff in his hand glowed slightly and created a pair of wings on his back. He then made these wings vibrate at high speed and flew back to the academy.

He was the dean of East Cove Higher Magic Academy. As long as he was still alive, he had to stop the Level-8 demon causing fear and destruction on his home ground. He had to defeat the demon, even if it meant burning his soul.

There would be something in this world that was worth sacrificing your soul for. To Anthony, the East Cove Higher Magic Academy was his life!

...

The Academy.

The Wind Tiger had long escaped into the Girvent Forest upon Tarviss' arrival. He had given up all thoughts of revenge and ran for his life.

This demon is slightly scary. I am not his opponent, so I will be better off finding beautiful ladies in the South.

Blood Demon Talon stood and watched from afar. His strength was not sufficient to even take part in this battle. He merely commended, "What great power, Sir Tarviss. Yes, destroy this damn academy!"

Tarviss never got the response he wanted from Bryant and had already descended into insanity. As another Mage Tower came into his field of vision, he saw a pathetic Magician standing on its rooftop.

"Pitiful mortal! Taste my fury!" Tarviss bellowed and widened his steps, charging towards the Mage Tower.

Tarviss envisioned the situation to be as such. He would slam his fist down on the Mage Tower and smash it to smithereens. In the process, the Magician would cry in despair and devastation, the perfect testament to his strength.

That Mage Tower was Herrera's.

Herrera had already left the Mage Tower together with her apprentice. She held Rylai's hand tightly and was running as far as she could from the demon. They had no clear destination, all they could think of was to escape.

This was true for all other Mage Towers. Herrera could see many other Magician's Apprentices on the run.

She suddenly heard Rylai cry out, "Where is mentor? Why is he not here?"

Herrera was taken aback and looked behind her and realized Link was indeed missing. At the same time, she saw the demon rushing towards her Mage Tower.

Herrera instantly panicked. She had no idea where Link went. However, she had a hunch that he was still in the Mage Tower, which was about to get destroyed!

Faced with the overwhelming power of a Level-8 demon, she had no idea what to do.

Just then, Herrera felt an incredible magic fluctuation from the rooftop of her Mage Tower. This fluctuation was extremely terrifying. Its appearance distorted the air a 30-foot-radius around the rooftop. The shockwaves from this distortion went even further, leaving its impact on the soul of every Magician in the academy.

In an instant, all the cries and screams of fear seemed to have vanished.

Even Tarviss did not expect such a turn of events. In his eyes, the Magician on the rooftop was merely an ant, to think that he would suddenly show such incredible strength.

This would probably be how it felt when one stamped down on an ant only to find out that it was a metal nail.

Tarviss halted his advance and asked, "Bryant?"

It had been too long. His memory of Bryant's power had already blurred. However, the young man standing right in front of him felt somewhat familiar.

There was no reply.

Following the terrifying outburst of energy was an incredible concentration of elemental energy. This attraction force was so great that even the elements in the elemental pools were not spared. Almost all the fire elementals in the academy seemed to be flying towards Herrera's Mage Tower.

At that moment, the Mage Towers who were casting fire elemental spells onto Tarviss were instantly interrupted. Every fire elemental Magician was also surprised to find that they could no longer cast spells.

A giant fire elemental hand then appeared on the rooftop.

The palm was extremely condensed, looking just like a crimson crystal. It was surrounded by a forcefield and slowly converged into lines of runes which connected themselves to the Magician casting the spell. This palm was so huge that the fingers themselves were 18 feet wide and 60 feet in length. Despite the fact that Tarviss was 90 feet tall, he seemed tiny in the face of this giant palm.

The moment the palm appeared, it charged straight towards Tarviss. It traveled at an incredible speed and was also extremely flexible.

"Bryant, finally!" Tarviss bellowed. He thought that this was his mortal enemy, Bryant and charged headlong into the palm.

The collision caused a large explosion in the air. A huge shockwave spread through the entire academy, and visible white ripples appeared in the air.

Every Magician's Apprentice covered their ears instinctively. Those who were stronger physical managed to hold their ground and remained standing. However, those who were physically weak fell down upon the impact of the shockwave.

The collision created a blanket of dust which obstructed their vision of the battle scene.

Amongst the dust cloud, sounds of explosions could still be heard. One could only imagine the intensity of the battle going on within. Around half a minute later, the dust cloud dissipated and an illumination spell appeared on top of a pivotal Mage Tower.

Under the illumination of the light, everyone could finally see the battle scene clearly. They were all shocked by the scene in front of them.

The crimson red hand was grabbing Tarviss tightly in its grasp. As much as Tarviss struggled and repeatedly released his terrifying demonic energy, he seemed to be unable to break through of its death grip.

Everyone knew exactly how violent and destructive Tarviss was.

To think that this spell could defeat Tarviss in a battle of strength. What power was this? A Magician who could create such an offensive spell must have been extremely wise! He was definitely a great Magician!

Oh, great Magician!

"In the name of the God of Light, Tarviss is restricted!"

"It did more than restrict Tarviss. It is clear that Tarviss is weaker than this Hand of God!

"Who is this Magician?"

The Magicians who stayed in their respective Mage Towers and were prepared to give up their lives in this final fight against Tarviss got the best view of the situation. They not only had a clear view of Tarviss, but also the Magician who was fighting on par with this demon.

A blue robe could only mean that he was of medium rank. Which middle-ranking Magician could possess such power?

However, someone recognized him from the color of his hair.

"He looks like Link!"

"How can it be? He just used a Level-9 spell! Only a Level-9 spell could have such terrifying power!"

The Magicians were both pleasantly surprised and confused. They could not figure out what happened.

At that moment, the Wind Tiger merely reached the edge of the academy. As he looked behind him and saw the terrifying scene, cold sweat broke out on his forehead. Damn, lucky I didn't charge straight in. Who would have thought this human infested academy would have a Level-9 Magician? This is even more terrible than the abyss!

Blood Demon Talon who was just praising Tarviss also became speechless.

For a Level-8 demon to lose in a one-on-one battle with a Magician from East Cove Higher Magic Academy—did the Queen of the High Elves come visit?

In the shadows, the Level-7 Magician Vance carefully observed this legendary battle. The blue flames in his eyes seemed extremely agitated, vibrating at a fast pace.

"Ah, what a beautiful spell. I did not think that the academy housed someone like this. It seems like Tarviss is in trouble." He then left after speaking.

The outcome of the battle had been decided—a Level-9 spell that was cast by a talented combat Magician. There was no way Tarviss could turn the tables around.

Tarviss was boiling with rage. He once again released his power while giving a low rumble, the demonic force that used to surround him visibly getting weaker.

"Get off me!" He shouted as he flailed his arms, trying to push the giant hand apart.

This time, he was successful. The palm opened and Tarviss quickly escaped. He then turned around and charged with full speed towards the Mage Tower where the accursed Magician was residing in.

He might not be able to compare with the Magician's spells, but he had more than enough power to destroy his physical body.

However, it was clear that Tarviss was naive.

The hand that he just escaped from instantly retreated back to the Mage Tower. While it was returning to the tower, the hand clenched into a fist, and as though it was charged with power beforehand, it punched with full force towards Tarviss.

This blow was inspired by the Fist of Firomoz spell!

Bang! The loud explosion echoed throughout the academy.

Tarviss felt as though a locomotive hit him. He immediately fell to the ground. However, the fist did not stop there. It continued to advance as Tarviss sank deeper into the ground.

Bang! Rumble! Tsssss!

The ground shook and a fissure 90 feet in length, 30 feet wide and 12 feet deep appeared.

This hit was the decisive blow. It destroyed the demonic forces surrounding Tarviss and had completely destroyed his willpower. He lay flat on the ground and was unable to even get up.

Link was still going to finish him off.

The Titan's Hand descended from above and grabbed tightly onto Tarviss' body. It then began to tighten onto Tarviss as Link activated the explosion spells he enchanted onto the fire elements in the center of the palm.

This attack was inspired by the Level-5 Flaming Hand spell!

Tarviss was feeling groggy from the previous assault and could not react in time. When he felt physical pain from the attack, it was already too late. The power of the Titan's Hand had already been heightened to its limit.

Tarviss was extremely clear of the horrific powers of a Level-9 fire elemental spell as he was once a Legendary professional. When he felt the extreme temperature of the hand far beyond the tolerance limit of any lifeform, he knew he was finished.

Under the restriction of the Titan's Hand and the explosive power of the fire elements, the inner environment of the Titan's Hand was akin to a high-pressure melting pot currently baking a huge Level-8 demon.

Under the pressure of such extreme temperature, Tarviss' body began to glow. This was due to the insane amount of fire elements rushing into his body and destroying the integrity of his cells.

He opened his mouth to scream but to no avail. Instead of a loud rumbling sound, flames emerged from his mouth, followed by his eyes, ears, nose and finally his skin.

Around ten seconds later, the fire elementals in the hand were completely used up. The Titan's Hand then released its grip, and a liquid similar to lava began flowing from where Tarviss once stood. That liquid was the remains of the demon who once terrorized the World of Firuman.

The fact that Tarviss was not vaporized by the heat was a testament to the hardness of his body.

This was the scene Anthony was greeted with when he finally rushed to the entrance of the academy. The entire academy watched this legendary scene with looks of admiration and disbelief.

Around the debris of the Heaven's Thorn, Selasse, whose legs were completely squashed by the rubble climbed out with great effort. He then took out his notebook and started writing with trembling hands, My words are pale in the face of such an event. They are completely incapable of expressing my feelings. However, I can confirm one thing. I believe that, in the near future, East Cove Higher Magic Academy will usher in the first Legendary Magician ever since its establishment!

Chapter 185

Conquering the East Cove Academy

On the Mage Tower rooftop.

Link leaned back against the railing and almost slumped down to the floor. The process of killing the Level-8 demon might seem easy to an onlooker, but in truth, the attack Link had just unleashed had cost him an unimaginably immense amount of energy that left him completely drained.

Tarviss was incessantly bursting with power, so Link must continuously direct his Mana into the Titan's Hand to maintain it as well. The Mana consumption rate, in this case, had soared up to 200 points per second!

In less than two minutes of fighting, Link had spent 220 Omni points to obtain an unlimited maximum Mana limit. He then drank two bottles of a mid-level Mana potion. Only then did he manage to kill the demon Tarviss, and even then, the demon had died right before the moment Link completely exhausted his store of Mana.

Mission: Investigate Black Moon Conspiracy (Failed)

Player successfully killed the demon Tarviss. 200 Omni Points rewarded.

These two notifications flashed into his view on the interface. Link now had 200 Omni Points, yet instead of celebrating he didn't even want to move an inch. He had overexerted himself in draining his Mana, and he was sure that the Mana potion he'd drank was now poisoning his body. All this had left him without even an ounce of energy to lift a finger at the moment. Maintaining a powerful Level-9 spell had been taxing his spirits as well, and he felt it was too much effort to even stay awake.

After some time, Link heard sounds of rushing footsteps approaching. It was followed by a familiar voice that was full of worry and anxiety.

"Link!" said Herrera. "Are you alright?"

Link didn't have the strength to even turn towards her at this point. All he could

manage was curl up his lips slightly in an effort to smile, but before that could happen, he was overcome by a sudden hazy sensation and blacked out immediately. But just before he completely collapsed, he heard Herrera's panicked voice again.

"Oh no!" said Herrera. "He drank two bottles of Mana potion! The toxins have spread into his bloodstream!"

Herrera had helped him the last time he drank too much Mana potion. She was now in the academy where she could get help from other people easily, so Link was sure that there wouldn't be any problem for her to help him this time. As a result, he fainted knowing that he was already in safe hands.

...

When Link woke up again, he found himself lying on a bed. He looked around and realized that he was in his room in Herrera's Mage Tower. He could feel that the bed sheets and the blanket that were covering his body were clean and crisp as if they had been recently changed. They even smelled fresh and fragrant. Link then noticed that he felt fine apart from feeling a little weakened and dizzy.

Link then sat up in the bed and discovered that the clothes on his body had been changed as well. His storage pendant and his protective spell magic ring were both still on his body, while his wand was placed on the table right beside the bed. Just as Link was about to climb out of bed, the door was pushed open, and Herrera walked in. She was pleasantly surprised to see Link already awake and rushed towards him immediately.

"How are you feeling?" she asked with concern.

"Not too bad," answered Link. By then, he was already out of bed pacing slowly back and forth in the room. "I feel a little dizzy, but that's about it."

As soon as he said that, Herrera's face turned slightly angry.

"Of course you'd feel dizzy," she said, gently but firmly reprimanding Link. "You overdosed on Mana potions again. This time you didn't use a spell to freeze your stomach, so the poison had spread into your bloodstream and flowed to the rest of your body. If it weren't for Master Grenci who managed to cure you with the Hundred Herbs medicine in time, you would've surely died!"

Master Grenci was one of the six members of the academy's high council. He was the best Alchemist in the entire East Cove Magic Academy. A Hundred Herbs medicine was his most treasured possession which was an epic-level poison antidote. It was an item so priceless that no amount of money would be able to buy it, and Master Grenci had treasured it more than any other of his creations.

"I must go thank him personally," said Link, full of gratitude.

"There's no need to hurry," said Herrera. "You can do that once you've fully recovered. I hope this will teach you not to do anything so risky next time...but I'm afraid that wouldn't ever happen."

Herrera's eyes began to redden. She knew more than anyone else how dangerous a situation Link had put himself in on that fateful night was. She still shuddered in terror as she thought about it. God of Light only knew how much anxiety this young man, who had no thought of his own safety, had caused her!

Link noticed the genuine concern in Herrera's expressions and felt both grateful to her and ashamed of himself for having put her through this. He walked slowly to the window and pushed the curtain aside to look out.

The weather was excellent this day. The sky was as bright as a blue jewel, rays of sunlight shone down like a heavenly golden waterfall, basking the whole academy in its shimmering glory and warmth.

From this point of view, Link could see the scars of destruction left by the demon Tarviss on the academy. Several Mage Towers had fallen and were reduced to rubble, and a large number of workers were busy clearing the space. A handful of Magicians stood aside guiding and helping the process with some magic spells. He could hear the sounds of their chattering voices sometimes while the workers were all hard at work sweating profusely; even the Magicians were covered in dirt and dust.

Further away, Link could see that the hole in the middle of Bryant's Inspiration Courtyard was filled up while some Magicians were busy dispelling the traces of demonic aura left by Tarviss there.

At this moment, the East Cove Magic Academy was just like a wounded old tiger licking its wounds and taking its time recuperating.

"Tutor," said Link after a while, "the dean..."

It was pure chaos at the time, so Link had no idea what had befallen the dean other than the fact that he sensed the sudden disappearance of Anthony's aura that night. Still, Link was unwilling to believe that a mighty Level-7 Master Magician would be killed so quickly and easily.

Herrera walked towards the window and smiled gently.

"The dean survived," she said. "He used Burst to escape in the nick of time. He has lost both of his legs, though."

"Oh, thank goodness!" exclaimed Link, visibly relieved now. To a soldier, losing limbs would be a great tragedy as they would have some difficulty in taking care of themselves. Yet, to a Magician, this was nothing but a cause of mere inconvenience.

"The academy lost six Mage Towers that night," Herrera continued, "the Heaven's Thorn was one of them. Nineteen full-fledged Magicians died in battle, 130 Magician's Apprentices were killed, and countless other people were injured. But in the end, it was not all in vain because the demon Tarviss had finally been killed!"

As she spoke, she turned her head towards Link and her eyes shone with gratitude.

"It was all thanks to you, Master Link!" she exclaimed.

"It was only my duty," answered Link who was slightly unnerved by Herrera's gentle and crystalline eyes staring straight at him. "Besides, you are my tutor; you shouldn't call me Master."

"I'm no longer your tutor, Link," she replied. "You have graduated. You are the most outstanding Magician the East Cove Magic Academy had ever produced!"

Link was stunned at Herrera's generous praise, but then she interrupted him before he could make any reply.

"It's almost noon now," she said. "Go put on your Magician's robe and get yourself ready for lunch."

"Yes, tutor," said Link, suddenly realizing that he was quite hungry. He turned around and took a glance at the garnet Magician's robe laid out on the table. As he approached it, he was immediately taken aback by its superior quality.

"Is this for me, tutor?" he asked incredulously.

He recognized the astounding quality of the robe's material at a glance. After further inspection, he discovered that it was made with Golden Fire Silk with many mysterious looking magic runes made with the world's softest Mana-conductive metal, Oester Silver. When he examined it more closely, he discovered that the spell structure on the robe was a Level-6 booster spell called Clear Thoughts.

Just as he was looking at the robe, a notification popped up on the interface.

Flame Controller

Quality: Epic

First Effect: Speeds up the rate of fire element accretion by 50%.

Second Effect: Boosts the resistance towards elemental spells by 100%.

Third Effect: Fixed with the spell Clear Thoughts, which when activated will restore 2000 points of Mana to the caster in five minutes. A gap of 48 hours is required before the spell can be re-cast.

(Note: This is a special gift from the East Cove Magic Academy!)

This was obviously an invaluable robe! For a Magician who had an affinity towards flame and fire like Link, this robe would be like a pair of wings given to an already mighty tiger, which would make him almost invincible! The spell Clear Thoughts would be especially helpful to him because it would greatly compensate for his biggest weakness that was his lack of Mana.

"Of course it is yours!" answered Herrera. "It is a special gift to you in return for saving the academy. The Golden Fire Silk was Master Ferdinand's prized possession, and the Oester Silver was from the dean. Meanwhile, Master Weissmuller was the one who made the robe with his own hands. And now, the robe is yours."

Link made no more pretenses to be polite and quickly took off his clothes and slipped into his new Magician's robe. It felt luxurious against his skin, and the superior style and quality of the robe was even more obvious now that he wore it. Because the robe could accumulate fire elements in the air, Link's body now seemed to be emitting a faint glow and because the fire elements were gathered on top of Link's head. It

seemed as if Link was wearing a flaming crown.

Link then cast a magic mirror to check how he looked. He was momentarily stunned at the majestic appearance of the robe and even thought that it might look too ostentatious on him. But he changed his mind moments after as he thought there would be no point in keeping a modest appearance now that he'd advanced this far. Besides, the dean, the six members of the academy's high council, and Herrera herself all wore extravagant robes, so it was no big deal that he was one wearing one himself.

"King Leon had sent a special tailor to help work on the robe as well," said Herrera, whose eyes shone brilliantly as she laughed. "He's obviously done an excellent job here."

Not only was the robe simply gorgeous to look at, but it also enhanced Link's presence and charisma while also underlining his calm and collected appearance. Link looked undoubtedly like the king of fire in this robe!

After that fateful night, no one questioned the profound acuity Link had on magic spells that involved fire elements. He was indubitably Firuman's greatest master of fire spells.

"How many days have I been unconscious?" Link asked, suddenly realizing that such a magnificent robe must've taken some time to prepare.

"Not too long," answered Herrera reassuringly, completely understanding Link's sudden confusion. "Only about three days."

The academy must've exerted enormous efforts in preparing such a Magician's robe in the short span of three days. Link almost felt as if he'd conquered the East Cove Magic Academy by defeating the demon Tarviss.

Later, Link followed Herrera out of his room and into the hall on the first floor, where Link was faced with a shocking sight.

Anthony, Grenci, Ferdinand, Weissmuller and the rest, not excluding all the Magicians in the academy who were of Level-5 and higher were present in the hall. All 37 people were waiting for Link.

Upon seeing Link, Anthony took the lead in standing up. His wounds had now healed almost perfectly thanks to a Priest's divine healing spells. He was fixed with a pair of

magical prosthetic limbs which allowed him to move just as he always did.

"Our hero is here!" he exclaimed joyously.

Everyone was sitting in the hall initially, but they all rose to their feet immediately upon seeing Link. Then, Anthony took the lead again in giving Link a respectful Magician's bow which was traditionally performed by a Magician of lower level to a Magician of a higher level.

Link was slightly dismayed by this treatment as he was only a Level-6 Magician in truth. The only reason why he could cast the Level-9 spell, Titan's Hand was because of the Prophetic White Stone's help. Meanwhile, the dean was a genuine Level-7 Master Magician, so Link felt he didn't deserve this kind of gesture at all.

The dean smiled gently as he noticed Link's obvious unease.

"We are aware that the Prophetic White Stone's power helped you," he said, "but, it alone would be useless in the hands of anyone else but you. None of us could control a Level-9 spell, let alone use it to defeat the Level-8 demon Tarviss. But you did it, and you've saved us all. That is the truth, and that is all that matters."

He then turned around and addressed everyone else in the room.

"Make way for Master Link!" he shouted. "Today the seat at the head of the table belongs to him!"

The Magicians in the hall then shuffled aside to make way for Link. On the dining table, he saw that a variety of scrumptious dishes had been laid out. They had obviously got wind of Link's recovery and made these special preparations just for him.

"Don't worry, Link," Herrera whispered, "this is everyone's way of showing their gratitude to you. You've earned their respect."

Link knew this, of course. He also knew that it would be a sign of disrespect if he were to turn down the dean's generous gesture.

"Thank you," said Link, returning the Magicians' bow respectfully. "I am moved by the generosity you have shown me today."

He then walked to his seat at the head of the table.

There was neither boastful arrogance nor exaggerated modesty in his expressions. He cut a strikingly calm figure against the backdrop of festive moods in the hall. Overall, he seemed like a man whose maturity far exceeded his young age.

None of the Magicians present were younger than 35 years old. In fact, Herrera who was the youngest there apart from Link was already 36 years old herself, while most of the rest had grey hair and beards. Naturally, they had been worried that the respect shown to such a young Magician would make him vain and conceited.

Just think about it—this was the person who could control an advanced Level-9 spell and defeat the mighty demon, Tarviss. For all they knew, Link could be bloated with pride right now!

But then Link's actions began to put them at ease. Once he'd taken his seat, everyone started to dine, and the atmosphere relaxed considerably. The crowd began to chat freely about magic and spells and Link himself would say a few words to the dean. In a few minutes, the tension in the air began to loosen, and everyone started to enjoy themselves.

After the meal, the table was cleared, and Anthony suddenly clapped his hand to get everyone's attention; the air became tense again. Link was surprised and didn't know what to expect next, but just then, Master Grenci walked up to him and placed a notebook in front of him.

"Master Link," he said, "this is a notebook that contains all the knowledge I've discovered throughout my life. I hope you may find some inspiration from it."

Then, the rest of the high council members—Ferdinand, Weissmuller, Hanswiser, and Andal all handed each of their own notebooks to Link, all reiterating Grenci's hope to one day inspire Link.

Link had stood up at this point. He did not refuse the Master Magicians' gifts. He knew that these contained precious wisdom that could not be found anywhere else in the world. They would be an invaluable help to him in advancing his magic skills.

Link bowed deeply each time he received a notebook. He was aware that this was the highest honor that could be bestowed upon a student of the academy. This meant that he had now been recognized as a stellar Magician by the most respected Magicians in the academy.

By now, although it wasn't explicitly stated that Link was the best Magician in the academy, the fact that he was presented the notebooks of the Master Magicians meant that he was implicitly recognized as one. Only three other people had ever received such an honor in the long history of the East Cove Magic Academy, and all three of these people had gone on to become the academy's dean.

In total, Link received 37 notebooks that day. He then bowed to the Magicians again and took out a notebook from his storage pendant and placed it on the table.

"I've recorded all of the Supreme Magical Skills that I've ever created in this notebook," he said. "It also contains some of my theories and deductions that I've accrued from the first day I started to learn magic. I would like to gift it to the academy so that anyone can read and study them. I hope it might one day inspire you to make new discoveries and advance your magic skills as well."

"Wow!"

The hall was now echoing in gasps and surprised exclamations by the Master Magicians. They soon erupted into warm applause. They had not expected him to give them anything, yet Link had gifted them with such a priceless item. Naturally, everyone there now found Link to be admirable and deserving of their respect.

There was not a trace of a doubt that Link was a peerless genius. His spells were full of innovation and creativity apart from being incredibly powerful. For that reason, his notebook was without question the most prized possession of the academy. It would be a great help to the Magicians of the academy as they advanced their levels.

Link himself wouldn't lose anything by giving this away. The Supreme Magical Skills he developed were indeed powerful. If he were to make this knowledge accessible to the Magicians of the academy, then that would only mean that more of them would become stronger and better Magicians who would fight better in the war against the dark forces in the future. That could only be a good thing.

Herrera looked on quietly as the scene unfolded in front of her among the crowd; she was deeply moved inside. She had watched Link grow up from a skinny Magician's Apprentice in tattered rags who had bloomed into such a powerful and formidable Master Magician who might one day become the next dean in slightly more than half a year. It was nothing short of a miracle.

Still, Herrera knew that as the God of Light's Chosen One, this was only the beginning. Link would be creating even more miracles in the future, and Herrera couldn't wait to see what they would be.

What miracles will he make next in the Ferde Wilderness? Herrera wondered with anticipation.



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